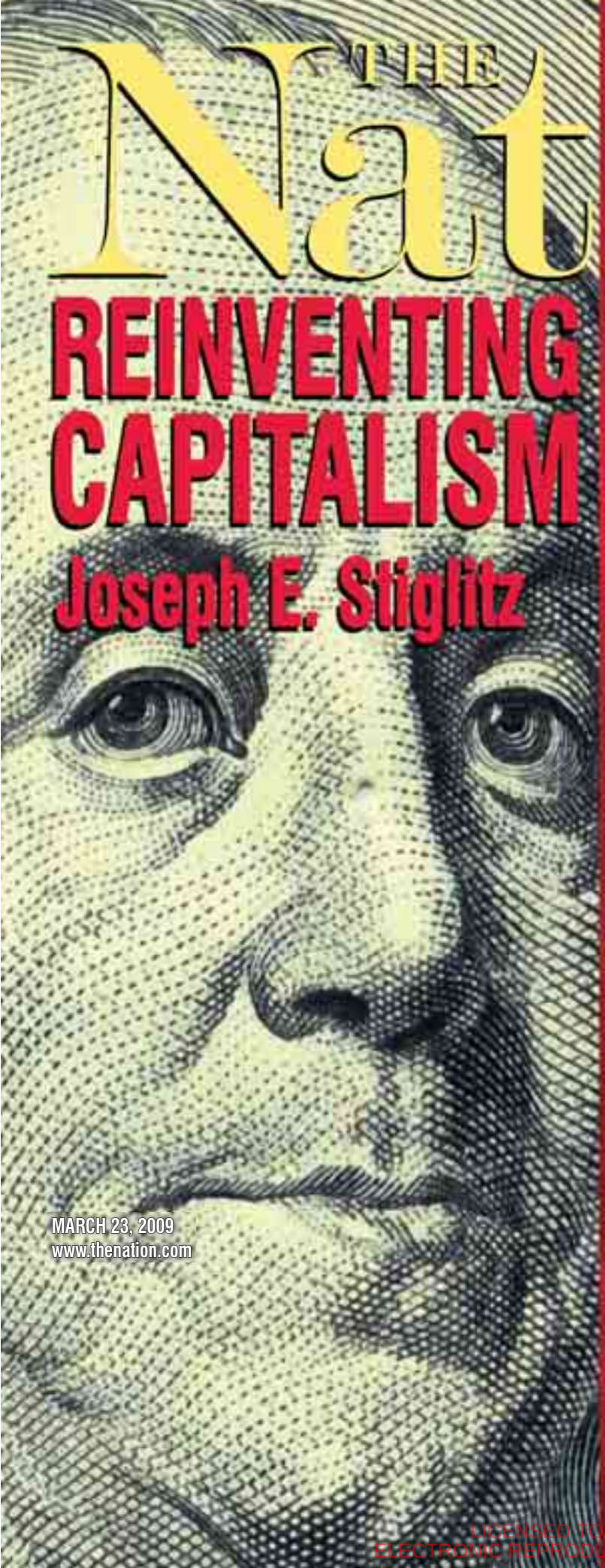

The Nation.

REINVENTING CAPITALISM

Joseph E. Stiglitz

REIMAGINING SOCIALISM

Barbara Ehrenreich & Bill Fletcher Jr.

with
TARIQ ALI
REBECCA SOLNIT
IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN
and BILL McKIBBEN

MARCH 23, 2009
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Letters

Give That Lady a Cigar!

Canton, Mich.
Re "The Old Dope Peddler" ["Letters," March 9]: I wish to thank *The Nation* for running the cigarette ad with the opportunity to take advantage of a coupon. Tobacco is a legal product, as are cellphones, books, sleep aids and pearl necklaces. If one has no need for a cellphone, sleep aid, cigarette or pearl necklace, don't buy one. First Amendment, anyone?
Mary Rose Weckerle

Santa Cruz, Calif.
Your response to letters critical of advertising tobacco is the most tortured piece of writing I have read since some Christian gave me a leaflet on avoiding hell. Your reasoning contained everything but the virtue of motherhood. You obviously stand on unstable ground.
Jack E. Ferguson

Paging Alexander the Great...

Placentia, Calif.
Your editorial "Don't Escalate in Afghanistan" [Feb. 23] is absolutely correct! Someone should remind our president and the Pentagon that only Alexander the Great succeeded in conquering that country.
Gabriella Kolias

Whiners of the World, Unite!

New York City
Congratulations on a terrific article: Nicholas von Hoffman's "Jobless in America" [Feb. 23] accomplishes something very important by bringing *Nation* readers the voices and stories of so many different people struggling to cope with this brutal economy of ours. It also accomplishes something important by letting these men and women—and others like them—realize that they are not alone.

Feelings of isolation, panic, shame, confusion, anger, guilt and much more are all hallmarks of our economic downturn. I was struck by Anonymous in Miami, who asked, "Where are other people's stories? I have been looking online..."

To Anonymous and others like him/her, I invite you to EconoWhiner.com, a website I founded with a small band of fellow "whiners" to give people hit hard by the economy a place to share their experiences, emotions and survival strategies. (The name was inspired by Phil Gramm's outrageous claim that there wasn't anything wrong with the economy—we are just "a nation of whiners." George Will went one better, calling us "crybabies of the Western world.")

EconoWhiner is for all of us, since no one is invulnerable in a world increasingly defined by extreme financial insecurity. People have been coming to the site and sharing such stories as, "You don't know me, but I lost my job last week," "Who do I have to know to get a job interview?" and "17 months unemployed—and counting." They've talked about what it's like to go through a foreclosure or a bankruptcy, to transition to life without credit cards, to sell treasured possessions online to pay for groceries. What it's like to work in an industry, or for a company, that's falling apart around you. How it feels to start every workweek feeling it's going to be your last.

Anonymous, you're not alone. Your story is important. Keep telling it. How else will life as we now know it get better?
Jill Fraser

Bulgaria's Jews in World War II

New York City; Sofia, Bulgaria
We wish to correct a small but significant detail in Akiva Gottlieb's "Schlepics" [Feb. 16]. Angel Wagenstein was never sent to "a Nazi labor camp." Bulgaria was an ally of Nazi Germany and when, in the spring of 1943, Hitler demanded the deportation of Bulgaria's Jews, Czar Boris III complied, sending to the death camps some 11,000 Jews from Thrace and Macedonia. Hitler had promised to

(continued on page 30)

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Comes the Change

President Obama's first budget is an audacious plan to transform America. Even while dealing with the worsening economic crisis, the president demands that we address the nation's other most pressing problems—from catastrophic climate change to our broken healthcare system. Once the economy has returned to growth, he calls for greater taxes on the wealthy to help cut the deficit in half over four years. Not since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and Ronald Reagan's conservative rollback has a president proposed anything this ambitious. If passed, it will mark a new era of progressive governance. And yet, in sad testament to how deeply we have fallen, its greatest weakness is that it is not bold enough.

COMMENT

The president calls for major expansion of the federal role in healthcare, energy and education. He'd make a significant down payment—more than $630 billion over ten years—on universal healthcare, which he wants passed this year. He invests in energy efficiency and projects passage of a cap-and-trade system to limit carbon emissions, auctioning permits to pay for tax cuts that will help working people defray the costs. He makes dramatic investments in education—doubling the number of children served by Early Head Start and turning Pell grants into an entitlement.

To help pay for this, he slaughters many sacred cows. He'll slash the obscene subsidies handed to insurance companies to compete with Medicare. Reduce prescription drug prices. Cut subsidies to agribusiness. Let Bush's tax cuts for those earning more than $250,000 expire. Tax the earnings of equity fund managers as income. Cut subsidies to oil companies. Eliminate banks from the student loan program.

This will spark the mother of all budget battles. Agribusiness, Big Oil, Big Pharma, Wall Street, the business, insurance and military lobbies—all are gearing up multimillion-dollar campaigns to block, limit or delay the change. Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich and Rush Limbaugh, will offer massive resistance, railing against deficit spending and taxes. A citizen mobilization will be needed across the country to sustain the reforms. Soon after the budget rollout, Obama warned the country that the lobbyists and interests are "gearing up for a fight as we speak. My message to them is this: so am I."

The conservative fulminations on spending and deficits aren't merely hypocritical from the party that doubled the national debt in a period of economic recovery. They are deeply wrongheaded. As Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke testified, the alternative to record deficits would be "a prolonged episode of economic stagnation."

In fact, the real danger isn't that Obama is spending too much, but too little. The budget optimistically projects that the economy will return to robust growth next year and enjoy brisk 4 percent growth thereafter. Tax hikes and spending cuts are slated to kick in as the economy recovers, leading even Bernanke to warn about the dangers of "premature removal of fiscal stimulus that could blunt the recovery."

The real threat we face isn't the conservative howl about spending and inflation; it's the clear and present danger of a global depression. Most likely, Obama will have to come back for another stimulus and more money for restructuring the banks. For obvious reasons, he is eager to reassure Americans that he will halve the deficit by the end of his term. But until the downturn is stemmed, focus on deficit reduction is misleading, if not dangerous.

Moreover, the president's plan is the

Inside

2 Letters

Editorials & Comment

3 **Comes the Change**
ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

4 **Obama's Iraq Exit**

5 **Noted**

6 **100 Days**
Green Power Struggle
CHRISTOPHER HAYES

8 **Tom Geoghegan's Run**
JOHN NICHOLS

10 **Ten Things**
What You Can Do to Stay in Your Home

Columns

6 **Deadline Poet**
Bobby Jindal Bombs
CALVIN TRILLIN

8 **Comix Nation**
STEVE BRODNER

11 **Beat the Devil**
The Third Obama
ALEXANDER COCKBURN

12 **Subject to Debate**
Lifestyles of the Rich and Generous?
KATHA POLLITT

Articles

13 **Reimagining Socialism: A Forum**
BARBARA EHRENREICH AND BILL FLETCHER JR.; IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN; BILL McKIBBEN; REBECCA SOLNIT; TARIQ ALI

22 **A Bank Bailout That Works**
Banks polluted the economy; it's a matter of equity and efficiency that they clean it up.
JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

27 **Lessons From Latin America**
Social movements provide a useful model for U.S. leftists wanting to influence Obama.
BENJAMIN DANGL

29 **America Is #… 15?**
Because of income inequality, the U.S. scores poorly on a new index of general well-being.
DALTON CONLEY

Books & the Arts

31 **LITTELL:** The Kindly Ones
SAMUEL MOYN

36 **HADLEY HADEN GUEST, ED.:** The Collected Poems of Barbara Guest
BARRY SCHWABSKY

39 **The Eye That Collects**
J. GABRIEL BOYLAN

42 **FILMS:** Tokyo Sonata • Hunger • Katyn
STUART KLAWANS

COVER DESIGN BY GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/AVENGING ANGELS; ILLUSTRATION BY JANNA BROWER

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News & Analysis

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Katrina vanden Heuvel: Healthcare as public service

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first step toward needed long-term reforms. His budget does little to challenge our bloated military budget. Domestic discretionary spending—everything other than entitlements like Social Security and interest on the national debt—declines to about 3.6 percent of the economy, the lowest level since 1962. When the deficit-financed recovery plan ends in two years, investment in education, energy, transportation and more will face deep cuts.

But none of this should distract from the scope of the battle ahead. The president has repudiated the failed conservative policies of the past and called on the country to change course. He has put forth a budget that calls for sweeping change. He has raised the stakes. This will be a transformational presidency if he succeeds. We dare not let him fail. ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

Obama's Iraq Exit

President Obama owes his election in part to his early, forceful opposition to the Iraq War and to the antiwar movement, which rallied around his candidacy. It is fitting, then, that one of the early acts of his presidency was to announce a plan to withdraw US forces from Iraq.

For the most part, Obama's plan is faithful to his campaign promises. It calls for the end of combat operations and the withdrawal of most of the 142,000 troops in Iraq by August 31, 2010 (slightly longer than the sixteen-month timeline he proposed during the election). But the plan includes a major asterisk that should be of concern to all who opposed the war and who supported a complete withdrawal of American forces: it would leave in Iraq a residual force of as many as 50,000 troops until the end of 2011, the date the US-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement stipulates the removal of all US troops. According to the president, this transitional force would have three missions: training Iraqi security forces, carrying out anti-terrorism missions and protecting American civilian and military forces.

EDITORIAL

In his speech at Camp Lejeune, Obama stressed the importance of diplomacy, "comprehensive engagement across the region" and cooperation with Iraq's neighbors and with the United Nations—signaling to the people of Iraq and the Middle East that the United States has no intention of permanently occupying Iraq or determining its future. But the presence of so many residual forces undercuts this message and undermines the main strategic reasons for an American withdrawal. The American troops—some stationed at the heavily militarized US Embassy, for example—will be a continual reminder of the occupation. At the least, they will be a diversion from the reconciliation within Iraq that is needed if it is to emerge as a stable country free of large-scale violence.

At worst, such a sizable force increases the risk that factions in Iraq will draw Washington back into the conflict by attacking US troops. Indeed, the presence of our forces beyond August 2010 makes a tempting target for groups in Iraq that would like nothing better than to rally an insurgency to challenge the dominant Shiite government. As we learned in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War, keeping US forces in a Muslim country can spark radical-

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Noted.

CLOSED DOOR, OPEN WINDOW: Things are turning out remarkably well for more than 200 former employees of **Republic Windows & Doors**, whose factory occupation in December drew national media attention and public support from **Barack Obama**. The laid-off workers ended their six-day sit-in victoriously, after negotiations with **Bank of America**, Republic's largest creditor, secured each a $6,000 severance package. Then on February 26, the California-based firm **Serious Materials**, which had reached out to the workers and their union, the **United Electrical Workers** (UE), announced plans to buy the plant and put everyone back to work making energy-efficient windows. Serious will reopen with a smaller workforce until business is up and running, but the company has agreed to rehire all the former employees, at the same pay and seniority levels they had before the plant closed.

"Serious has been a real beacon in the night to us," says **Ricky Maclin**, who started at Republic seven years ago and is vice president of **UE Local 1110**. Meanwhile, the happy ending for Maclin and his fellow workers has made them beacons in the night to workers across the country. Credit is due the careful planning and creative thinking of the Republic workers' union, which spent years developing collaborative relationships with labor groups around the world and drew particular inspiration from factory occupations in Latin America and Canada. "The UE has been trying to figure out innovative ways to stop plant closings for decades," says **Mark Meinster**, the union's international representative. "When people are really concerned about an economic crisis, you can win broad support for some pretty militant tactics, and that gave us the confidence to go forward with this." MAX FRASER

ALL'S FAIR? When the **FCC**'s fairness doctrine was in place from 1949 to 1987, it was often criticized by journalists who felt that it constrained debate. Overly cautious broadcasters steered discussion away from topics that might stir public outcry and bring an FCC rebuke. Still, most Americans liked the idea of fairness, and since the doctrine was ditched, honest players on the left and right have proposed its restoration. Unfortunately, the debate about bringing the fairness doctrine back was not driven by those honest players. It became a distraction, designed to create the fantasy that a Democratic Congress—faced with daily radio attacks from **Rush Limbaugh** and the conservative amen corner—would use its newfound authority to censor critics. **Ben Scott**, the policy director of the media reform network **Free Press**, put it best when he said, "An uncharitable interpretation is that they [Republicans] need an issue that unites their base and is an easy talking point for conservative radio."

When the issue came before the Senate in late February, most Democrats joined all the Republicans in an 87-11 vote telling the FCC not to restore the doctrine. The GOP claimed a victory. But the truth is that the media reform movement has seldom made the fairness doctrine its focus. Reformers want competition, diversity of ownership and voices, and a commitment to localism and community coverage. Where to begin? Make sure that Obama's investment of $7.2 billion to expand broadband access prohibits grant recipients from selling any service that violates open Internet principles, and require recipients to offer interconnection on a reasonable and nondiscriminatory basis. And pass the bipartisan **Local Community Radio Act**, which will make it easier to establish many more low-power, noncommercial radio stations. JOHN NICHOLS

CLIMATE CROWD: A new report from the **Center for Public Integrity** offers dramatic illustration of what is sure to be a contentious battle over President Obama's proposed "market-based cap on carbon pollution." The study found that last year more than 750 businesses and interest groups hired 2,340 lobbyists to influence federal policy on climate change—a whopping 300 percent increase since 2003, when the **Climate Stewardship Act**, the first to propose a cap on carbon emissions, was killed in the Senate. There are now four lobbyists on climate change for every Congress member.

According to the report, the **Chamber of Commerce** and the **National Association of Manufacturers** are the most heavily invested opponents of a carbon cap. But an increasing number of environmental groups, municipal governments and mass transit agencies have hired lobbyists to push back. Some corporations with alternative energy interests, like **Johnson & Johnson**, **DuPont** and **GE**, are now lobbying in support of an emissions cap. Even private equity firms and banks like **Goldman Sachs** and **JPMorgan Chase** have joined the melee, hoping to cash in on what could be a $2 trillion market in cap-and-trade emissions permits. LOREN LYNCH

IT'S A LOCKE? After being forced to give up on his initial picks for **secretary of commerce** and **secretary of health and human services**, President Obama has come up with new nominees—one pretty good, one pretty bad. Kansas Governor **Kathleen Sebelius** is a dramatically better prospect for the HHS post than **Tom Daschle**. As the Democratic governor of a red state, Sebelius battled to expand access to healthcare and organized the **Kansas Health Policy Authority**, which recommended the development of a single-payer system as one of four reform options. Unfortunately, neither the HHS nominee nor Obama is doing much to push single-payer federally. But Sebelius's record as the insurance commissioner of Kansas is rich with examples of her willingness to take on insurance giants and the healthcare industry. Let's hope she'll bring some of that spirit to the healthcare reform debate.

Obama's nominee for commerce secretary, former Washington Governor **Gary Locke**, has less to recommend him. An over-the-top advocate for free trade agreements, he was at the forefront of the push to get Democrats to implement permanent normalization of trade with China, over the concerns of human rights groups. Locke claimed that easing trade rules "will strengthen the rule of law and accelerate domestic reforms in China." He was wrong. A State Department review, released the same week that Locke was nominated, observed, "The [Chinese] government's human rights record remained poor and worsened in some areas." Locke might be a little better than discarded commerce pick **Judd Gregg** on some domestic issues. But on international trade, his record is as bad or worse. JOHN NICHOLS

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ization. For now, Al Qaeda has discredited itself in much of the Muslim world, and Sunnis in Iraq have turned against its senseless violence. But a large US military presence, rather than ensuring against Al Qaeda's return, would be an invitation for it and other Islamist groups to rally recruits to their cause. Maintaining 50,000 troops in one of the most dangerous countries in the Middle East for nearly three more years will be a huge drag on the budget, adding to the $3 trillion price tag of the Iraq War when all our resources are needed to rebuild our tanking economy.

Finally, there are significant gaps in Obama's Iraq plan that deserve scrutiny. On March 4 he launched a crackdown on wasteful and fraudulent spending, declaring that "the days of giving defense contractors a blank check are over." This valuable initiative could be a first step toward removing the 150,000 mercenaries and private contractors in Iraq, who now outnumber US military forces, but Obama's current Iraq plan does not lay out a timeline for their withdrawal. It should. Likewise, Obama has not ruled out permanent US military bases in Iraq; an announcement to that effect would bolster the chances for genuine Iraqi sovereignty. We welcome Obama's decision to withdraw troops, but let's make sure he sticks to his timeline for ending this war.

Green Power Struggle

100 DAYS

In 1979 Gus Speth, a Yale-trained lawyer and cofounder of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), became chair of President Carter's Council on Environmental Quality. He was 37. Approached by two scientists concerned about the rise in the earth's temperatures as a result of increased carbon emissions, Speth commissioned a study. "It created quite a stir," he says. "It got a lot of media attention.... In 1981 we knew enough that I'm quoted in the *New York Times* saying we ought to cap greenhouse emissions at no more than 50 percent above the preindustrial level."

On March 2 Speth, now dean of Yale's School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, was back in Washington—this time to take part in what promised to be the largest act of climate-change civil disobedience in American history. Along with fellow environmental movement veterans Bill McKibben, Wendell Berry and NASA climatologist Jim Hansen; anti-coal activists from Appalachia; and some of the 12,000 student activists who had flooded Washington for the Power Shift 09 climate change conference, Speth marched to the Capitol Hill power plant, a few blocks south of the Capitol. There they blocked the five entrances and waited for the handcuffs.

The tussle over the plant is a perfect parable of the failure of our political system to respond to the threat of climate change. Built in 1904, the plant provides heat and cooling to about two dozen buildings, including the Capitol, the Supreme Court and Union Station. In 2000 the Architect of the Capitol, who oversees the physical plant, submitted a plan to replace coal, by far the worst carbon emitter of all fossil fuels, with oil or natural gas. Coal-state Senators Robert Byrd and Mitch McConnell sent a letter expressing their displeasure, and promptly secured $1 million for the Interior Department to study how to integrate new coal technologies into plant upgrades. Nine years later, despite Speaker Nancy Pelosi's plan to "green the Capitol," the plant still burns coal, the last coal-fired facility inside the DC line.

The protesters who surrounded the plant reflected the growing diversity of interests in the climate change/green jobs coalition: indigenous teenagers whose ancestral lands have been ravaged by the dirty energy economy, white grandmothers from Kentucky who have seen their communities suffocated under the toxic runoff from mountaintop removal, and young hipsters and hippies hoping for a future in green jobs. The mood was boisterous and exultant but disciplined: an exercise in cheerful, polite militancy (sample sign: MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL LACKS MY APPROVAL). One protester apologized to the fluorescent-vested police for having made them stay out in the cold. Margaret Stewart, who'd come from Louisville with a group of Kentuckians fighting mountaintop removal, put it this way: "We're not here to make trouble. We're here because we've tried everything else. If there were any other way to make change, we'd do it."

The crowd was so well behaved, in fact, the police decided it wasn't worth the hassle of locking them up, and made no arrests. But the action had already won its immediate demand: a few days before—thanks to some behind-the-scenes lobbying from a number of green groups—Pelosi and Harry Reid had sent a letter to the Architect of the Capitol supporting a phase-out of coal at the power plant.

It seems safe to say that the movement to stop the planet from overheating has entered its second act. Thirty years after Speth's first report, the establishment—politicians, elite media, business leaders—has finally (finally!) accepted the simple fact that burning fossil fuels is warming the planet and courting catastrophe. Now comes the hard part: doing something about it.

The political economy of Washington is so dysfunctional that there's only one way of getting large-scale progressive legislation passed: pay off the opposition. The stimulus was a case in point. This doesn't mean it was a bad bill, but the Chamber of Commerce endorsed it for a reason; the money was spread around enough to buy Big Business's acquiescence. Likewise, if

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Bobby Jindal Bombs

Republicans had hoped they might rekindle
Their party's prospects through one Bobby Jindal.
But Jindal proved an easy man to mock
(He's like the dorky page on *30 Rock*).
So Sarah Palin might just have her day—
With hopes that Tina Fey will stay away—
Though Romney nurtures still that White House yen.
His imitator's Barbie's boyfriend, Ken.

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we get universal healthcare, the insurance industry's grudging acceptance will likely have to be purchased, at a price.

The problem is that in the case of climate change, the interest most zealously opposed, the coal industry, cannot be bribed, because carbon reduction is incompatible with coal burning. Or, as a popular sign at the protest succinctly put it, it's Coal vs. Climate.

But climate activists find themselves victims of their own rhetorical success: they've offered such a promising picture of the clean energy future that their opponents are busy trying to crowd into the frame. From John McCain to Chevron to the coal lobby, everyone's for clean energy. (My favorite chant of the day: "Unicorns, leprechauns, clean coal!") Coal companies, like the tobacco companies before them, have adopted a strategy of obfuscation and false offers of cooperation. "They actually believe they'll be able to trick me and this generation into thinking we can unite behind them," says Jessy Tolkan, executive director of the Energy Action Coalition, which sponsored Power Shift 09. "I sat next to representatives from Duke Energy who said, 'I get you care about climate change. We care about climate change. We're partners in this fight.' My response is, I don't buy that and my generation doesn't buy that. We know that coal is not part of our clean energy future. We won't be tricked. We won't be fooled."

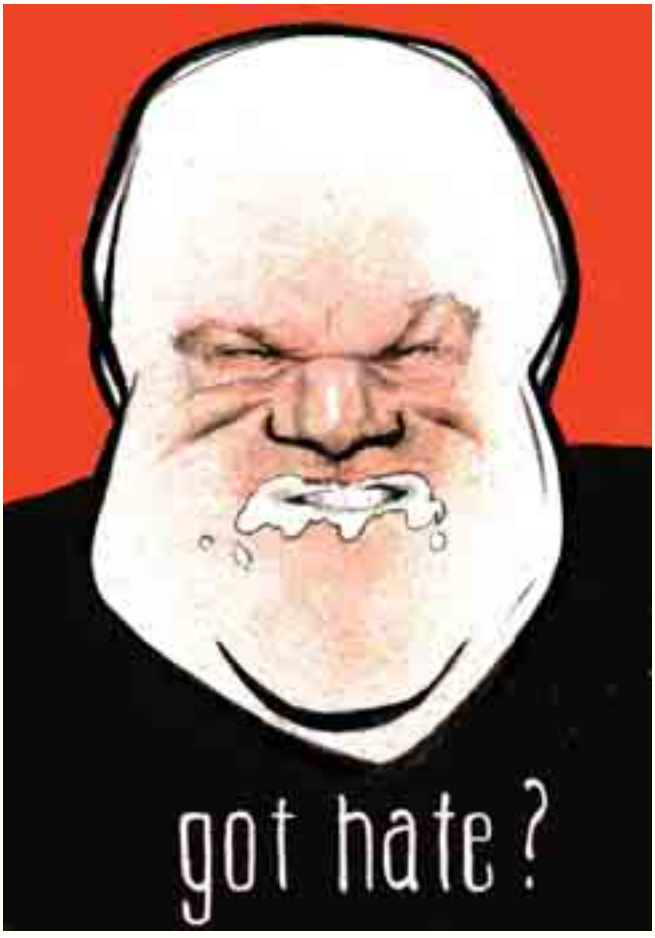
For the climate change movement, the demands are clear: carbon legislation this year and a moratorium on new coal plants. As Speth can attest, and as the sad story of the little Capitol power plant demonstrates, making this happen is a huge challenge. The only way it will be met is with a raw exercise of power from organized citizens. That's the thinking behind the younger generation of climate change organizers who came together from every state of the union at Power Shift 09. They were trained in lobbying over the weekend, broken up by district and, on Monday, set loose on the Hill for 378 separate meetings with Congress members and their staffs.

Emily Hawkins, who worked on Power Shift 09 and is the daughter of David Hawkins, NRDC's director of climate programs, said, "Something I heard my dad say, and a lot of people from his generation say throughout the weekend, was, 'We've been waiting thirty years for this movement to look like this, and it finally does.' And you could just see them walking around with tears in their eyes, they were so thrilled."

Outside the power plant, the crowd of 2,500 shivered in the cold, but as the hours passed, a summer grin never left Gus Speth's face. "I'm overjoyed to see this day," he told the crowd. "For those of us who worked on this for decades, haven't we been ineffectual!" he yelled with a chuckle. "We've testified, I've written four books…we've made speeches. We haven't done one thing. We haven't built a movement." CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Comix Nation

by STEVE BRODNER



Tom Geoghegan's Run

Tom Geoghegan's unlikely run in the first special Congressional election of the Obama era yielded the likely result: a defeat. The labor lawyer and author inspired enthusiastic support from fellow public intellectuals, liberal bloggers and activists who are pushing the Obama administration toward a new New Deal. But Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley, who had a reputation as a reformer, plus newspaper endorsements and more money, easily won the March 3 primary for the Chicago seat vacated by White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel.

Geoghegan may not have prevailed in the vote, but he won the ideas primary. How? Most Congressional Democrats merely promise to preserve Social Security; Geoghegan proposed a massive extension of it. "Social Security now pays about 38 to 39 percent of your working income. In other developed countries, it averages 65 percent," he says. "That's where our fiscal stimulus should be: a commitment to reach this goal, a public pension that ordinary working people can live on." Geoghegan's idea isn't just a smart response to an economic meltdown that's left tens of millions with empty retirement accounts. It's smart politics. Democrats are going to need a plan to provide for the retirement of hard-working Americans whose 401(k)s are fading fast. Geoghegan has provided that plan. Though he lacked the prominence and resources to win his primary, Geoghegan's big idea will eventually prove to be a winner for Democrats who are smart enough to adopt it. JOHN NICHOLS

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Homeland Security

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Ten Things.

This monthly feature was conceived by writer and Nation *editorial board member Walter Mosley as a kind of do-it-yourself opinion and action device. Most often "Ten Things" will offer a brief list of recommendations for accomplishing a desired political or social end, sometimes bringing to light something generally unknown. The purpose of the feature is to go to the heart of issues in a stripped-down, active and informed way. After getting our visiting expert—or everyday citizen—to construct the list, we will interview that person and post a brief online version of "Ten Things," with links to relevant websites, books or other information. Readers who wish to propose ideas for "Ten Things" should e-mail us at NationTenThings@gmail.com.*

Ten Things You Can Do to Stay in Your Home

Without resolving the chicken-egg question of which came first, the housing crisis or the banking crisis, we can say that the pace of foreclosures is accelerating with the downward economic slide. Every thirteen seconds, an American loses his/her home. In 2008, more than 2.3 million families faced foreclosure. If the government doesn't intervene in a muscular way, an estimated 6 million owners will lose their homes in the next three years. President Obama has proposed to attack the crisis with a $75 billion initiative, the Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan. A commendable effort to directly address the problems faced by homeowners, the bill nevertheless has inherent limitations on who can benefit from it.

As a kind of home remedy, so to speak, *The Nation* and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) have issued a useful list of ten ways to prevent or fight foreclosure. (Check out "Ten Things" on TheNation.com for more links.)

1 Make sure your loan has a fixed rate of interest and not a variable rate. If it has variable rate, work with your mortgage lender to get it to a lower fixed rate.

2 Seek out HUD–certified counselors (hud.gov) when you are thinking of refinancing. Contact only nonprofit agencies such as legalaid.org. You do not have to pay a fee to get out of foreclosure.

3 If you are being foreclosed, call the ACORN foreclosure hot line immediately, at (347) 410-5894.

4 Do not take out loans that are beyond your financial means. Do not make payments to any institution except your lender.

5 If you are a renter in a house that has been foreclosed, your landlord must give you notice before evicting you. Once you are given notice, find out how much time you have—the laws vary from state to state. For renters' rights in a particular state, search hud.gov/renting/tenantrights.cfm. Go to nolo.com, click on "Property & Money" and go to "Foreclosure" for more information. (If you have info or resources on renters' rights, please send an e-mail to NationTenThings@gmail.com.)

6 Avoid companies that promise a quick fix. Go to fraudguides.com/mortgage-foreclosure-rescue-scam.asp to see a list of scams.

7 If you believe you are in a foreclosure scam, contact a lawyer immediately. Go to naca.net or foreclosurelegalassistance.org. Always use an attorney with a background in representing families in foreclosure.

8 Stay in communication with your bank, and always ask questions when you don't understand something that was said or something that you read. Go to responsiblelending.org/glossary.html for an explanation of foreclosure terms.

9 Support organizations that assist families with foreclosures: Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America (naca.com), Center for Community Change (communitychange.org), Take Back the Land (takebacktheland.org), National Low Income Housing Coalition (nlihc.org), Housing Assistance Council (ruralhome.org) and National Housing Law Project (nhlp.org).

Watch testimonials on the Brave New Films website, fightingforourhomes.com.

10 Call your local ACORN chapter for help (acorn.org/offices). Volunteer to be a home defender in your area. Display an ACORN Foreclosure-Free Zone sign in front of your house or apartment. Tell family and friends facing foreclosure to seek counseling from ACORN, and tell Congress to keep families in their homes. Go to acorn.org and click on "Action" for more information on advocacy.

CONCEIVED BY **WALTER MOSLEY**
with research by **Rae Gomes**

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Alexander Cockburn

The Third Obama

So far as I can figure it at this early stage of the game, we elected at least three presidents last November, all of them identified by the name Barack Obama. Unfortunately, the one on duty in the Oval Office most of the time, the First Obama—the one the elites picked as their man—is sticking to utterly conventional and catastrophic policies. Here is a man who has spent a lavish portion of his first hundred days setting the stage for what bids fair to be one of the greatest foreign policy disasters of the postwar epoch, in Afghanistan and Pakistan. To find parallel cases of lunatic misjudgment, you have to go all the way back to 1961 and John F. Kennedy's twin commitments to ratchet up the US intervention in Vietnam and greenlight the attempted invasion of Cuba.

Now Obama is pulling troops out of Iraq (except for the 50,000 he wants to leave installed in long-term garrisons) to send them at prodigious expense well beyond the present means of penniless Uncle Sam to ignite widening disaster in Afghanistan. With its lethal onslaughts into Pakistan, the United States is in the process of finishing off the tottering Zardari regime, ushering in a military coup directed by Islamic fundamentalists in profound sympathy with the Taliban.

In concert with militarist continuity from the Bush years, Obama's lawyers have told federal judges they are explicitly continuing Bush policies on rendition, indefinite detention, spying and telecom immunity. Obama also echoes Bush in contradicting the National Intelligence Estimate, insisting that Iran is working on nukes.

At home, disaster is not impending but upon us. The US Titanic took another huge lurch on the first two trading days of March, as the financial markets looked at the plummeting dividend figures from flagship firms like GE and HSBC; AIG's fourth-quarter loss of $61.7 billion (the largest in US corporate history); and the impending write-down in commercial real estate, which will tear another huge hole in the Titanic's hull.

No budget proposal coming out of the White House should ever be taken seriously. But even if Obama's is properly regarded as merely an advertisement of good intentions, what has there been by way of substantive action in these first crucial days to reverse economic catastrophe? The stimulus package will scarcely deal with the job losses of the past three months. Trillions have been tossed uselessly to the banks, on the recommendation of the bankers and their pitchmen, with whom Obama has surrounded himself.

In sum, the First Obama is doing badly.

The Second Obama is the one who talks a great game, as the Republicans are finding out. Standing in the Salt Lake City airport on March 2, I caught sight of him introducing Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius as his next nominee to run Health and Human Services. You can bathe in the uplifting torrent of Obama's words like a convert at a baptism and come up out of the water believing that true healthcare reform is right around the next corner.

The Third Obama doesn't slip into the Oval Office too often, meaning, of course, that he's the one the progressives staked their hopes on. On the evidence of his modest achievements thus far, he's the one who'll be the object lesson in vindicating the very old-fashioned left idea that it will take forces larger than one good guy in the White House to bring radical change to America.

But last month the Third Obama got something done. Here's how it happened. Obama was sworn in as president on January 20, and two days later the Drug Enforcement Administration celebrated the new era by raiding a medical marijuana dispensary run by wheelchair-bound Ken Estes in South Lake Tahoe, California. Now, on the campaign trail Obama had been very specific about the weight of federal law (which the DEA brandishes) relative to state laws decriminalizing or legalizing medical marijuana in thirteen states.

"What I'm not going to be doing," he told Gary Nelson of the Medford *Mail Tribune*, "is using Justice Department resources to try to circumvent state laws on this issue, simply because I want folks to be investigating violent crimes and potential terrorism." So to the hopeful medical marijuana lobby the DEA raid came like a punch in the nose. Fred Gardner, who edits *O'Shaughnessy's*, a pro-cannabis doctors' journal, reported the raid on the *CounterPunch* website on February 4. That same day, the White House announced that Obama's commitment to honoring state medical marijuana law would be implemented by his yet-to-be-named DEA administrator. On February 25 Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the federal government would no longer raid or prosecute medical marijuana dispensaries in states where they are legal.

In 1931, as the economy tanked and America headed into the Great Depression, the National Economic League polled its members—a sound cross-section of educated opinion—on the nation's most pressing problems. The easy winner? Prohibition. It cantered home well ahead of unemployment and economic stabilization. Ending Prohibition was functional to social control. If people could head for the bars, they'd be less likely to man the barricades, calling for real change.

As FDR's popularity soared, so Obama's popularity has soared for dope smokers, among them those for whom the herb is the best and cheapest line of defense against pain. The Third Obama honored a commitment and thereby no doubt offended the pharmaceutical industry, which correctly sees legal marijuana as representing a potentially huge erosion of its commercial turf. Give the Third Obama a clap on the back. He needs all the encouragement he can get to sneak into the Oval Office more often. The First and Second Obamas can't hope to stay so high for long in the popularity stakes, and Obama really wants to be liked. ■

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Katha Pollitt

Lifestyles of the Rich and Generous?

The gods of publishing must have had a good laugh when they arranged for philosopher Peter Singer to bring out *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* in the middle of the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression. First Worlders have a moral obligation to give away thousands of dollars—thousands!—a year of personal income to eradicate Third World poverty? Right. Even when Americans had jobs and 401(k)s, they weren't exactly emptying their wallets for the 1.4 billion people who live in absolute destitution—$1.25 a day or less—in the developing world. How much harder to get people to give when money is tight, so many are broke and even those who are doing all right are worried and afraid for their future.

Even today, though, as Singer would be the first to remind us, an ordinary middle-class American lives like Louis XIV compared to the destitute villagers and slum dwellers of Africa, Asia and elsewhere around the globe. Singer can sound a bit puritanical when he scoffs at our outlays on $4 lattes, restaurant meals, concerts, movies, that second glass of wine we don't really want and the $600 worth of clothes in their closet that women supposedly haven't worn for a year. Bottled water comes in for special scorn. His point, though, isn't that we should forgo all pleasure but that we have more disposable income than we think we do—enough to save the lives of many people. If you put it like that—hmm, do I go out for pie or vaccinate ten children?—the answer is pretty clear.

Singer suggests that those in the bottom half of the top 10 percent—those who make between $105,001 and $148,000—give 5 percent of their income, with graduated increases for those who make more. In other words, a person who made $147,000 would give $7,350, leaving him/her a comfortable $139,650 to live on. If the nearly 15 million people in the top 10 percent followed his proposal, they would generate $471 billion for the Third World poor. If those below gave just 1 percent of their income, the total would increase to $510 billion. If the rest of the developed world followed suit, the total would be eight times what the United Nations estimates is needed to reach the Millennium Development Goals for global health, education, employment, gender equality and so on by 2015.

How likely is it that people, even those in the top 10 percent, will take up the challenge? Hard times can make people cling to what they have, but they can also make people think differently. There's more to life than bottled water, after all. The hyperconsumption that was a fun spectator sport for so many during flush times—remember *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*?—no longer looks so amusing today. People hate hate hate Bernie Madoff, a criminal, but they also hate hate hate Merrill Lynch's John Thain and his $35,000 commode, Citibank's Sandy Weill and his corporate jet, and all those Wall Streeters with their multimillion-dollar bonuses, the very people who just yesterday represented the acme of human aspiration and the generators of that rising tide that was going to lift all boats. There's a lot of rage and spite and schadenfreude floating about against the privileged—just ask former *Self* editor in chief and bestselling author Alexandra Penney, who lost her life savings to Madoff and made the mistake of writing in the Daily Beast and elsewhere expecting sympathy because she had to fire the maid, sell her vacation home and, after thirty years of riding in taxis, ask a friend how to use a MetroCard. Never mind that she was the victim of a conman who fooled far shrewder financial minds; most commenters thought she was "greedy" for investing with Madoff and richly deserved her downfall.

The skewed values of the boom years—which I realize were only boom years for some—extend far beyond the corporate world. They corrupted the nonprofit world too: the million-dollar galas that raised a million dollars, the college presidents and NGO heads paid like CEOs of major corporations. I stopped donating to the New York Public Library when it gave its president and CEO Paul LeClerc a several-hundred-thousand-dollar raise so his salary would be $800,000 a year. Writing my modest check to the Friends of the Library made me feel pathetic, like one of the Southern Italian peasants in Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* who gave Christmas presents to the local landowners instead of the other way around. If the library needed money, why didn't it start by asking LeClerc to give back, say, half a million dollars a year? That would buy an awful lot of books—or help pay for raises for the severely underpaid librarians who actually keep the system going. And LeClerc's case, though egregious, is part of a trend: a few minutes clicking around on charitynavigator.org will turn up lots of salaries in the $400,000 and over range. The usual justification is that you need to pay humongous salaries to get the best people, but I don't believe it. There are lots of "best people" out there. If a Wall Streeter won't take a pay cut to do some good in the world, the heck with him. Nobody needs to make $800,000 a year. That's *twenty times* the median household income.

Now that middle-class Americans are getting mad about inequality here at home instead of just getting mad at poor people, can the feeling be extended to the far greater inequalities between global North and South? What would that take? I'm not as sanguine as Singer that philanthropy can turn the world around: we need to look at trade policies, debt, financial regulation and labor laws as well. Obama's budget reportedly doubles foreign aid, but how much of that will go to client states like Israel and Egypt, and how much to build clinics in Liberia and Cambodia?

It's all very well to be outraged by John Thain and his ilk, but to the world's poor billions, Thain is us. ■

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REIMAGINING SOCIALISM

Socialism's all the rage. "We Are All Socialists Now," Newsweek *declares. As the right wing tells it, we're already living in the U.S.S.A. But what do self-identified socialists (and their progressive friends) have to say about the global economic crisis? The following essay will, we hope, kick off a spirited dialogue, with four replies in this issue and more to come at TheNation.com.* *—The Editors*

Rising to the Occasion

Do socialists have a plan?

by BARBARA EHRENREICH AND BILL FLETCHER JR.

If you haven't heard socialists doing much crowing over the fall of capitalism, it isn't just because there aren't enough of us to make an audible crowing sound. We, as much as anyone on Wall Street in, say, 2006, appreciate the resilience of American capitalism—its ability to regroup and find fresh avenues for growth, as it did after the depressions of 1877, 1893 and the 1930s. In fact, *The Communist Manifesto* can be read not only as an indictment of capitalism but as a breathless paean to its dynamism. And we all know the joke about the Marxist economist who successfully predicted eleven out of the last three recessions.

But this time the patient may not get up from the table, no matter how many times the electroshock paddles of "stimulus" are applied. We seem to have entered the death spiral where rising unemployment leads to reduced consumption and hence to greater unemployment. Any schadenfreude we might be tempted to feel as executives lose their corporate jets and the erstwhile Masters of the Universe wipe egg from their faces is quickly dashed by the ever more vivid suffering around us. Food pantries and shelters can no longer keep up with the demand; millions face old age without pensions and with their savings gutted; we personally are consumed with anxiety about the future that awaits our children and grandchildren.

Besides, it wasn't supposed to happen this way. There was supposed to be a revolution, remember? The socialist idea, prediction, faith or whatever was that capitalism would fall when people got tired of trying to live on the crumbs that fall from the chins of the rich and rose up in some fashion—preferably inclusively, democratically and nonviolently—and seized the wealth for themselves. Such a seizure would have looked noth-

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ing like "nationalization" as currently discussed, in which public wealth flows into the private sector with little or no change in the elites that control it or in the way the control is exercised. Our expectation as socialists was that the huge amount of organizing required for revolutionary change would create an infrastructure for governance, built out of—among other puzzle pieces—unions, community organizations, advocacy groups and new organizations of the unemployed and nouveau poor.

It was also supposed to be a simple matter for the masses to take over or "seize" the physical infrastructure of industrial capitalism—the "means of production"—and start putting it to work for the common good. But much of the means of production has fled overseas—to China, for example, that bastion of authoritarian capitalism. When we look around our increasingly shuttered landscape and survey the ruins of finance capitalism, we see bank upon bank, realty and mortgage companies, title companies, insurance companies, credit-rating agencies and call centers, but not enough enterprises making anything we could actually use, like food or pharmaceuticals. In recent years, capitalism has become increasingly and almost mystically abstract. Outside manufacturing and the service sector, fewer and fewer people could explain to their children what they did for a living. The brightest students went into finance, not physics. The biggest urban buildings housed cubicles and computer screens, not assembly lines, laboratories, studios or classrooms. Even our flagship industry, manufacturing autos, would require major retooling to make something we could use—not more cars, let alone more SUVs, but more windmills, buses and trains.

What is most galling, from a socialist perspective, is the dawning notion that capitalism may be leaving us with less than it found on this planet, about 400 years ago, when the capitalist mode of production began to take off. Marx imagined that industrial capitalism had potentially solved the age-old problem of scarcity and that there was plenty to go around if only it was equitably distributed. But industrial capitalism—with some help from industrial communism—has brought about a level of environmental destruction that threatens our species along with countless others. The climate is warming, the oil supply is peaking, the deserts are advancing and the seas are rising and contain fewer and fewer fish for us to eat. You don't have to be a freaky doomster to see that extinction may be what's next on the agenda.

In this situation, with both long-term biological and day-to-day economic survival in doubt, the only relevant question is: do we have a plan, people? Can we see our way out of this and into a just, democratic, sustainable (add your own favorite adjectives) future?

Let's just put it right out on the table: *we* don't. At least we don't have some blueprint on how to organize society ready to whip out of our pockets. Lest this sound negligent on our part, we should explain that socialism was an idea about how to rearrange ownership and distribution and, to an extent, governance. It assumed that there was a lot worth owning and distributing; it did not imagine having to come up with an entirely new and environmentally sustainable way of life. Furthermore, the history of socialism has been disfigured by too many cadres who had a perfect plan, if only they could win the next debate, carry out a coup or get enough people to fall into line behind them.

But we do understand—and this is one of the things that make us "socialists"—that the absence of a plan, or at least some sort of deliberative process for figuring out what to do, is no longer an option. The great promise of capitalism, as first suggested by Adam Smith and recently enshrined in "market fundamentalism," was that we didn't have to figure anything out, because the market would take care of everything for us. Instead of promoting self-reliance, this version of free enterprise fostered passivity in the face of that inscrutable deity, the Market. Deregulate, let wages fall to their "natural" level, turn what remains of government into an endless source of bounty for contractors—whee! Well, that hasn't worked, and the core idea of socialism still stands: that people can get together and figure out how to solve their problems, or at least a lot of their problems, collectively. That we—not the market or the capitalists or some elite group of über-planners—have to control our own destiny.

We admit: we don't even have a plan for the deliberative process that we know has to replace the anarchic madness of capitalism. Yes, we have some notion of how it should work, based on our experiences with the civil rights movement, the women's movement and the labor movement, as well as with countless cooperative enterprises. This notion centers on what we still call "participatory democracy," in which all voices are heard and all people equally respected. But we have no precise models of participatory democracy on the scale that is currently called for, involving hundreds of millions, and potentially billions, of participants at a time.

What might this look like? There are some intriguing models to study, like the Brazilian Workers Party's famous experiments in developing a participatory budget in Porto Alegre. *Z Magazine* founder Michael Albert developed a detailed approach to mass-based planning that he calls participatory economics, or "parecon," and one of us (Fletcher, in his book *Solidarity Divided*, written with Fernando Gapasin) has proposed a locally based network of people's assemblies. But all this is experimental, and we realize that any system for mass democratic planning will be messy. It will stumble; it will be wrong sometimes; and there will be a lot of running back to the drawing board.

But as socialists we know the spirit in which this great project of collective salvation must be undertaken, and that spirit is solidarity. An antique notion until very recently, it flickered into life again in the symbolism and energy of the Obama campaign. The Yes We Can! chant was the slogan of the United Farm Workers movement and went on to be adopted by various unions and community-based organizations to emphasize what large numbers of people can accomplish through collective action. Even Obama's relatively anodyne calls for a new commitment to volunteerism and community service seem to have inspired a spirit of "giving back." If the idea of democratic planning, of controlling our destiny, is the intellectual content of socialism, then solidarity is its emotional energy source—the moral understanding and the searing conviction that, however overwhelming the challenges, we are in this together.

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Professor Robert C. Bartlett is Professor of Political Science at Emory University, where he holds the Arthur M. Blank/National Endowment for the Humanities Distinguished Teaching Professorship. He received his M.A. in Classics and his Ph.D. in Political Science from Boston College.

Professor Bartlett is the author of numerous scholarly works, including translations of Xenophon and Plato. Repeatedly recognized for teaching excellence by the Emory University chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, he holds a Crystal Apple Award for excellence in undergraduate lecturing.

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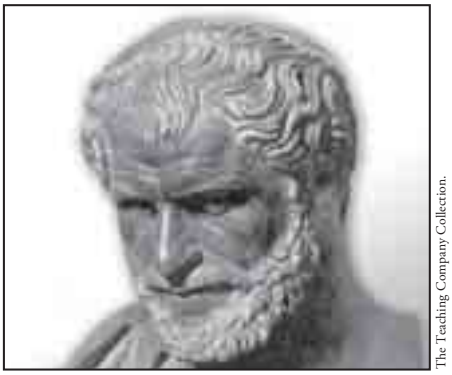

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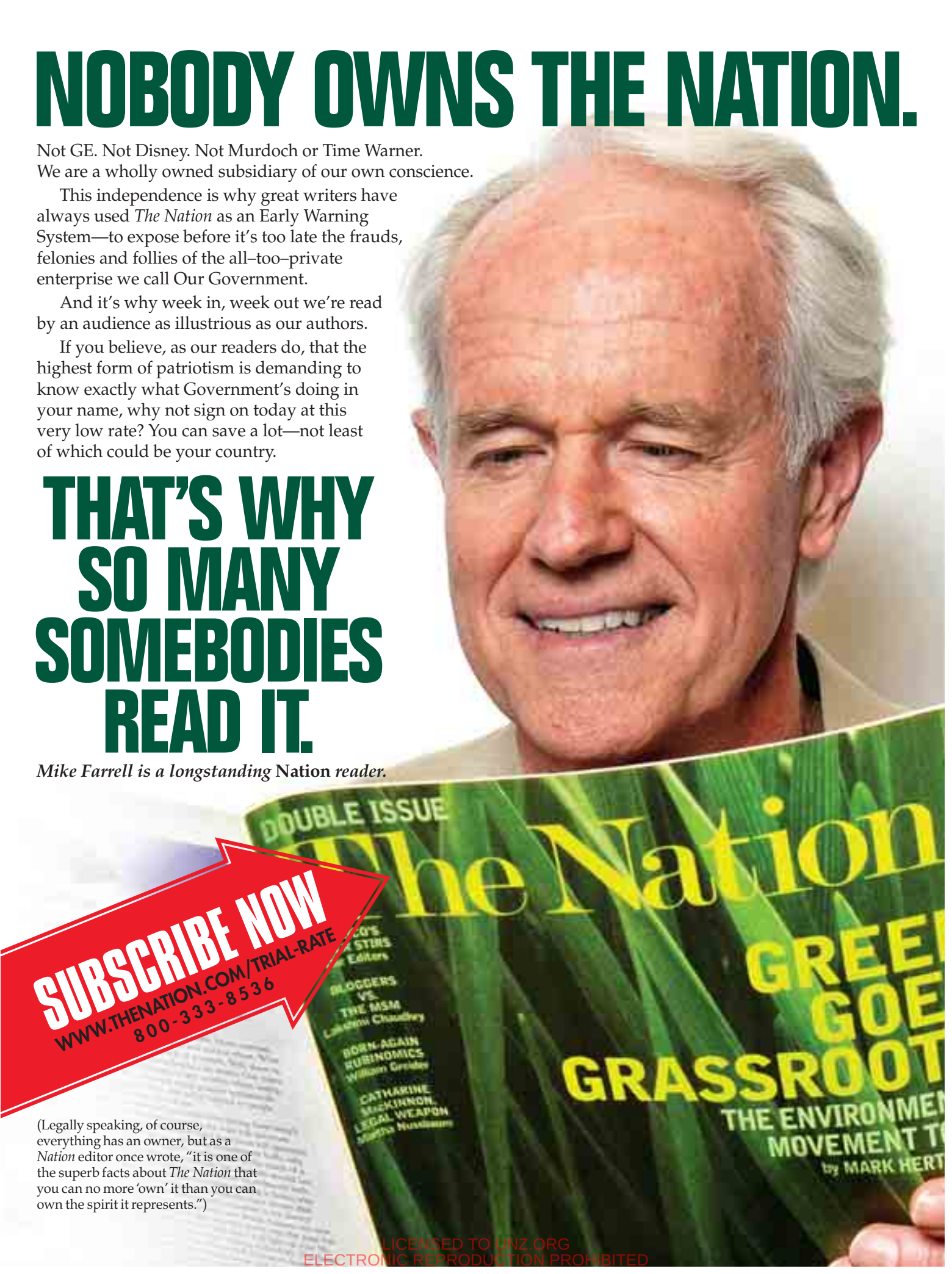

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Solidarity, though, is an empty sentiment without organization—ways of thinking and working together, and of connecting the social movements that are battling injustice every day. We see a tremendous opportunity in the bleak fact that millions of Americans have been rendered redundant by the capitalist economy and are free to dedicate their considerable talents to creating a more just and sustainable alternative. But if we are serious about collective survival in the face of our multiple crises, we have to build organizations, including explicitly socialist ones, that can mobilize this talent, develop leadership and advance local struggles. And we have to be serious, because the capitalist elites who have run things so far have forfeited all trust or even respect, and we—progressives of all stripes—are now the only grown-ups around.

Barbara Ehrenreich is the author, most recently, of This Land Is Their Land: Reports From a Divided Nation. *Bill Fletcher Jr. is the executive editor of* The Black Commentator.

Immanuel Wallerstein

There seem to me to be two occasions, which require two plans for the world left, and in particular for the US left. The first occasion is in the short run. The world is in a deep depression, which will only get worse for at least the next one or two years. The immediate short run is what concerns most people who are facing joblessness, seriously lowered income and in many cases homelessness. If left movements have no plan for this short run, they cannot connect in any meaningful way with most people.

The second occasion is the structural crisis of capitalism as a world system, which is facing, in my opinion, its certain demise in the next twenty to forty years. This is the middle run. And if the left has no plan for this middle run, what replaces capitalism as a world system will be something worse, probably far worse, than the terrible system in which we have been living for the past five centuries.

The two occasions require different, but combined, tactics. What is our short-run situation? The United States has elected a centrist president, whose inclinations are somewhat left of center. The left, or most of it, voted for him for two reasons. The alternative was worse, indeed far worse. So we voted for the lesser evil. The second reason is that we thought Obama's election would open up space for left social movements.

The problem the left faces is nothing new. Such situations are standard fare. Roosevelt in 1933, Attlee in 1945, Mitterrand in 1981, Mandela in 1994, Lula in 2002 were all the Obamas of their place and time. And the list could be infinitely expanded. What does the left do when these figures "disappoint," as they all must do, since they are all centrists, even if left of center?

In my view, the only sensible attitude is that taken by the large, powerful and militant Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil. The MST supported Lula in 2002, and despite all he failed to do that he had promised, they supported his re-election in 2006. They did it in full cognizance of the limitations of his government, because the alternative was clearly worse. What they also did, however, was to maintain constant pressure on the government—meeting with it, denouncing it publicly when it deserved it and organizing on the ground against its failures.

The MST would be a good model for the US left, if we had anything comparable in terms of a strong social movement. We don't, but that shouldn't stop us from trying to patch one together as best we can and do as the MST does—press Obama openly, publicly and hard—all the time, and of course cheering him on when he does the right thing. What we want from Obama is not social transformation. He neither wishes to, nor is able to, offer us that. We want from him measures that will minimize the pain and suffering of most people right now. That he can do, and that is where pressure on him may make a difference.

The middle run is quite different. And here Obama is irrelevant, as are all the other left-of-center governments. What is going on is the disintegration of capitalism as a world system, not because it can't guarantee welfare for the vast majority (it never could do that) but because it can no longer ensure that capitalists will have the endless accumulation of capital that is their raison d'être. We have arrived at a moment in which neither farsighted capitalists nor their opponents (us) are trying to preserve the system. We are both trying to establish a new system, but of course we have very different, indeed radically opposed, ideas about the nature of such a system.

Because the system has moved very far from equilibrium, it has become chaotic. We are seeing wild fluctuations in all the usual economic indicators—the prices of commodities, the relative value of currencies, the real levels of taxation, the quantity of items produced and traded. Since no one really knows, practically from day to day, where these indicators will shift, no one can sensibly plan anything.

In such a situation, no one is sure what measures will be best, whatever their politics. This practical intellectual confusion lends itself to frantic demagoguery of all kinds. The system is bifurcating, which means that in twenty to forty years there will be some new system, which will create order out of chaos. But we don't know what that system will be.

What can we do? First of all, we must be clear what the battle is about. It is the battle between the spirit of Davos (for a new system that is not capitalism but is nonetheless hierarchical, exploitative and polarizing) and the spirit of Porto Alegre (a new system that is relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian). No lesser evil here. It's one or the other.

What must the left do? Promote intellectual clarity about the fundamental choice. Then organize at a thousand levels and in a thousand ways to push things in the right direction. The primary thing to do is to encourage the decommodification of as much as we can decommodify. The second is to experiment with all kinds of new structures that make better sense in terms of global justice and ecological sanity. And the third thing we must do is to encourage sober optimism. Victory is far from certain. But it is possible.

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So, to resume: work in the short run to minimize pain, and in the middle run to ensure that the new system that will emerge will be a better one and not a worse one. But do the latter without triumphalism, and knowing that the struggle will be tremendously difficult.

Immanuel Wallerstein, senior research scholar at Yale University, is the author, most recently, of European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power.

Bill McKibben

A few weeks after taking office, Steven Chu, Obama's Nobel Prize–winning energy secretary, gave his first interview, with the *Los Angeles Times*. The reporter asked him about climate change. "I don't think the American public has gripped in its gut what could happen," he said, describing the computer models that showed the snowpack in the Sierra Nevada would melt ever faster in the years ahead. Should that happen, he said, "We're looking at a scenario where there's no more agriculture in California." And he added, "I don't actually see how they can keep their cities going" either. Well.

In Barbara Ehrenreich and Bill Fletcher's very fine essay, the most important section is about what has changed: first, the economic carnage all around us, but second—even more important—the wave of environmental destruction crashing over our heads. I'm definitely not a laissez-faire, Ayn Rand, libertarian capitalist. (Is anyone anymore? Alan Greenspan is calling for nationalizing the banks.) But I'm not sure I'm much of a socialist either, because both those faiths seem to me rooted in an earlier moment—a moment when we had some margin. A moment when the problem was growth and how best to make it happen and share its fruits.

That's not our problem anymore. Our problem is how to deal with a crisis that will define our world for the foreseeable future. In November the International Energy Agency announced that all its earlier rosy forecasts about oil supplies were wrong—in fact, the world's oilfields are facing "natural declines" in yield of about 7 percent a year. The fuel for free-market fundamentalism and Marxism was fossil fuel, and we're not going to have it. (Or to the extent we do, and that extent would be coal, we're not going to be able to burn it without triggering even more climate chaos.) The atmosphere that birthed all our ideologies held about 275 parts per million CO_2. Now that number is 387 parts per million, which is why the Arctic is melting. Our foremost climatologists tell us that the chief goal of any politics for the twenty-first century has to be getting that number back down below 350, because the current elevated levels are "simply not compatible with keeping a planet similar to the one on which civilization developed." All that is frozen melts into the sea, or something like that.

That world is necessarily going to be tougher. We will have to focus on essentials, like food and energy, far harder than in the past. I think we'll need to find our livelihoods more locally, reducing the inherent vulnerabilities that go with a heavily globalized economy. At the moment less than 1 percent of America works on the farm—that's a number that must rise. To the extent that government can help, it will be by pushing us away from the fossil fuel that underwrites our danger: a stiff cap on carbon will make the transition we require happen more quickly, though it will be tough to endure.

In fact, the only way to endure the transition will be with a renewed sense of community. The real poison of the past few decades has been the hyper-individualism that we've let dominate our political life—the idea that everything works best if we think not a whit about the common interest. In the end, that has damaged our society, our climate and our private lives. The first and final hope we have is a resurgence of a politics that calls on us to work together. We saw glimpses of it in the Obama campaign, which was at least as interesting as the man himself. I hope we'll see many more such glimpses in the years ahead.

Bill McKibben is co-founder of 350.org, the largest global grassroots organizing campaign on climate change.

Rebecca Solnit

Barbara Ehrenreich and Bill Fletcher write mournfully that there was supposed to be a revolution—but there was and is a revolution, just not one that looks the way socialists and a lot of '60s radicals imagined it. The Sandinista revolution thirty years ago may well have been the last of its kind. The revolutions that have mattered since have been less interested in seizing and becoming the state than circumventing it to go straight to becoming other people doing other things without state permission. The fifteen-year-old Zapatista revolution, which never sought state power and (though badgered constantly) was never defeated, is the revolution for our times, or really only the most dramatic of countless thousands involving Native Americans and Indian farmers and South African cooperatives and Argentinian workplaces and European utopian communities.

In the United States the most obvious realm in which this has transpired is food and farming. Organic, urban, community-assisted and guerrilla agriculture are still small parts of the picture, but effective ones—a revolt against what transnational corporate food and capitalism generally produce. This revolt is taking place in the vast open space of Detroit, in the inner-city farms of West Oakland, in the victory gardens and public-housing of Alemany Farm in San Francisco, in Growing Power in Milwaukee and many other places around the country. These are blows against alienation, poor health, hunger and other woes fought with shovels and seeds, not guns. At its best, tending one's garden leads to tending one's community and policy, and ulti-

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56 MAR/APR 2009
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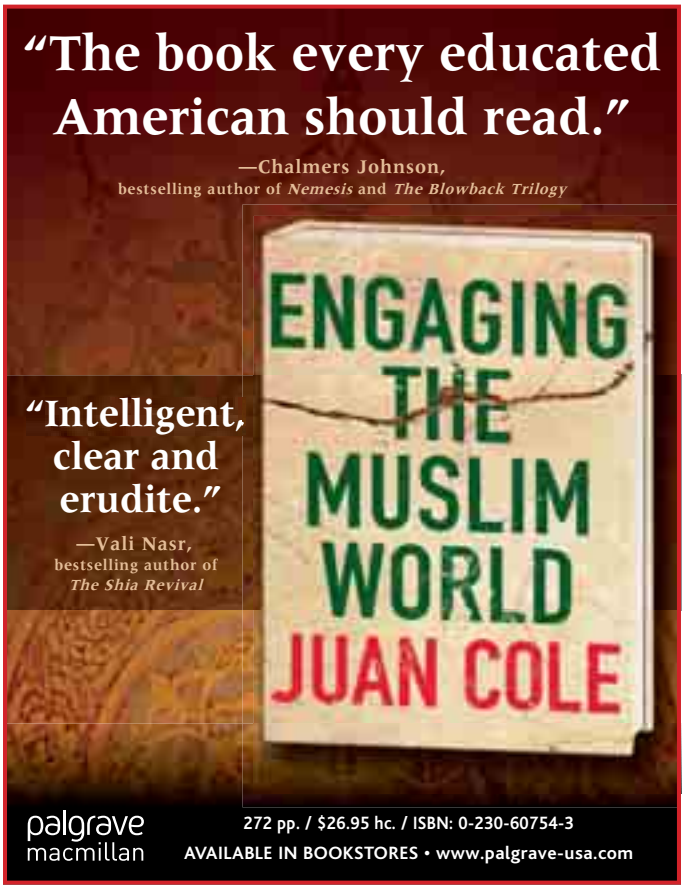
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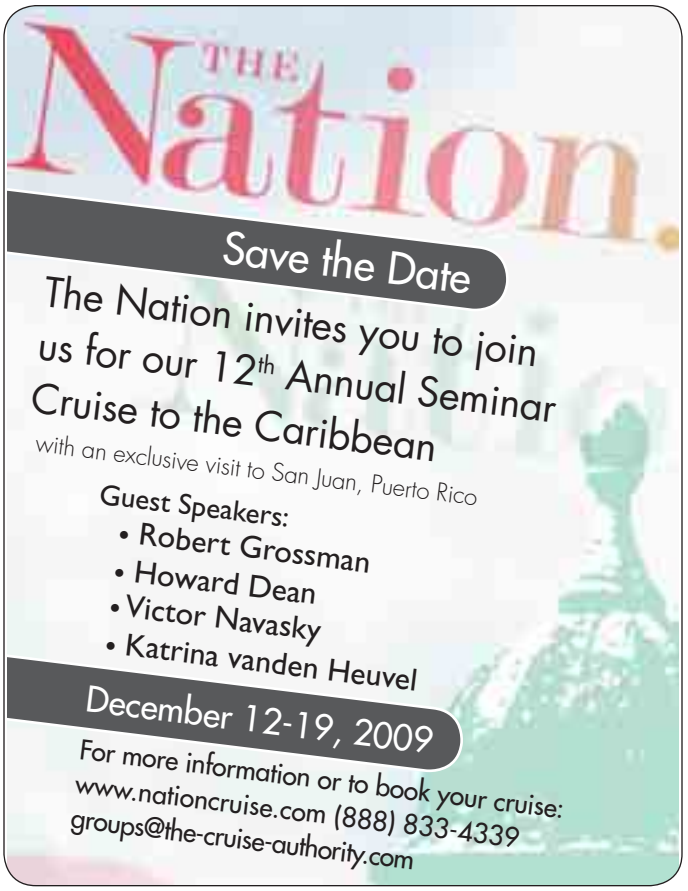
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mately becomes a way of entering the public sphere rather than withdrawing from it.

"Do we have a plan, people?" Ehrenreich and Fletcher ask. We have thousands of them, being carried out quite spectacularly over the past few decades, for gardens and childcare co-ops and bicycle lanes and farmers' markets and countless ways of doing things differently and better. The underlying vision is neither state socialist nor corporate capitalist, but something humane, local and accountable—anarchist, basically, as in direct democracy. The revolution exists in little bits everywhere, but not much has been done to connect its dots. We need to say that there are alternatives being realized all around us and theorize the underlying ideals and possibilities. But we need to start from the confidence that the revolution has been with us for a while and is succeeding in bits and pieces. Enlarged and clarified, it could answer a lot of the urgent needs the depression brings.

If anarchists and neoliberals had one thing in common, it was an interest in shrinking the state that socialists hoped would solve things. Right now nothing but that state exists on a scale to drag us back out of what the corporations and international markets dragged us into, but one of the questions for the long term is about scale. Small isn't always beautiful, but big beyond accountability or comprehension got crazy as well as ugly.

Rebecca Solnit is a contributing editor at Harper's. *Her book on disaster and civil society,* A Paradise Built in Hell, *will be out later this year.*

Tariq Ali

The crisis confronting capitalism is a vivid demonstration of the vapidity that underlay the appeal of globalization (*aka* the Washington Consensus) as a mantra for all seasons, all times, all countries and all continents. Mass unemployment once again threatens the advanced capitalist world, as it has during thirty-four business cycles since 1854. Ehrenreich and Fletcher map today's conditions, underline the weaknesses of the left on every level and then pose the old question, What is to be done?

Before addressing the question, a few points of disagreement. Despite mocking those on the left who, in the past, saw every downturn as an opportunity to proclaim that the end of capitalism was nigh, the authors fall into the same trap. This time, we are told, the "patient may not get up from the table." I don't agree. Capitalism is always faced with crises, which are part of the deadly logic of an economy based on a state-buttressed market system. It has failed many times before but has recovered, including during periods when it confronted real political challenges. Its ability to adapt and survive should not be underestimated, even though it will do so, as before, at the expense of the majority it exploits.

Until the emergence of a viable sociopolitical and economic

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alternative, perceived by a majority as such, there will be no final crisis of capitalism. In order to save themselves, today's elites will consider approaches to the crisis that preserve the status quo. The choice they are faced with domestically is between establishing a public utility credit and banking operation geared to reviving a productive sector, or shoring up a discredited, deregulated Wall Street/City of London operation based on fictive capital. The bailouts in New York and London are designed to do the latter. Globally, it's more difficult to accept a loss of Atlanticist control, but if pressure continues to mount, the Far Eastern bloc might suggest a new set of institutions based on multilateral rather than imperial control, leading to dismantling but also renewal.

What of the alternatives? With the post-1990 entry of capitalism into Russia, China, Vietnam, etc., the global media networks crowed that the capitalist Cinderella had defeated the ugly sisters, communism and socialism. The shift was experienced by a majority of the world's less-privileged citizens as a collapse of all anti-capitalist perspectives.

A new mood for change developed slowly: the Caracazo in 1989, Seattle a decade later, followed by the birth of a World Social Forum to counter the ideology of Davos, followed by a set of mass social movements in South America. The dramatic collapse of the Argentinian economy led to workers' self-management experiments, factory occupations and district soviets (councils) in Buenos Aires to discuss a different future. In Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay, the social movements challenging the neoliberal order produced governments that represented a new form of radical social democracy that seeks to combine state, socialized, cooperative, small-scale private and individual enterprises. These popularly elected governments broke the isolation of Cuba and obtained its help in constructing health and education infrastructures that benefit the majority. If Cuba, in turn, learned the importance of political pluralism from its new allies, the results would be beneficial.

What happens in Latin America is important for the United States. The backyard has moved indoors. The large Hispanic population within US borders maintains links with its past. The effect has sometimes been negative—e.g., among Cubans in Florida, but there, too, the mood is changing. The social movements in South America challenged deregulation and privatization more effectively than organized labor has done in North America or Western Europe. If adopted in the United States, this model could build popular pressure for a nationalized health service, massive investment in education and reduced military spending, and against bailouts for the car industry and sinking airlines. Let them fall, so that a public transportation infrastructure can be built based on an ecologically sound and more efficient train service that serves the needs of all. Without action from below, there will be no change from above.

Tariq Ali is an editor at New Left Review. *His latest book is* The Duel: Pakistan on the Flightpath of American Power *(Scribner).*

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A Bank Bailout That Works

Banks have polluted the economy; it's a matter of equity and efficiency that they clean it up.

by JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

The news that even Alan Greenspan and Senator Chris Dodd are supporting bank nationalization shows how desperate the situation has become. It has been obvious for some time that a government takeover of our banking system—perhaps along the lines of what Norway and Sweden did in the '90s—is the only solution. It should be done, and done quickly, before even more bailout money is wasted.

The problem with America's banks is not just one of liquidity. Years of reckless behavior, including bad lending and gambling with derivatives, have left them, in effect, bankrupt. If our government were playing by the rules—which require shutting down banks with inadequate capital—many, if not most, banks would go out of business. But because faulty accounting practices don't force banks to mark down all their assets to current market prices, they may nominally meet capital requirements—at least for a while.

No one knows for sure how big the hole is; some estimates put the number at $2 trillion or $3 trillion, or more. So the question is, Who is going to bear the losses? Wall Street would like nothing better than a steady drip of taxpayer money. But the experience in other countries suggests that when financial markets run the show, the costs can be enormous. Countries like Argentina, Chile and Indonesia spent 40 percent or more of their GDP to bail out their banks. For the United States, the worry is that the $700 billion appropriated for the bank bailout may turn out to be just a small down payment.

The cost to the government is especially important, given the legacy of debt from the Bush administration, which saw the national debt soar from $5.7 trillion to more than $10 trillion. Unless care is taken, government spending on the bailout will crowd out other vital government programs, from Social Security to future investments in technology.

There is a basic principle in environmental economics called "the polluter pays": polluters must pay for the cost of cleaning up their pollution. American banks have polluted the global economy with toxic waste; it is a matter of equity and efficiency that they must be forced, now or later, to pay the price of cleaning it up. As long as the banking sector feels that it will be bailed out of disasters—even ones it created—we will continue to have a moral hazard. Only by making sure that the sector pays the costs of its actions will efficiency be restored.

The full costs of those mistakes include not just the $700 billion bailout but the almost $3 trillion shortfall between the economy's potential output and its actual output resulting from the crisis. Since we are not forcing banks to pay these full costs imposed on society, we should hear no complaints from them about paying for the much smaller direct costs of the bailout.

RICHARD DREW/AP

A trader watches the treasury secretary from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

The politicians responsible for the bailout keep saying, "We had no choice. We had a gun pointed at our heads. Without the bailout, things would have been even worse." This may or may not be true, but in any case the argument misses a critical distinction between saving the banks and saving the bankers and shareholders. We could have saved the banks but let the bankers and shareholders go. The more we leave in the pockets of the shareholders and the bankers, the more that has to come out of the taxpayers' pockets.

Principles and Goals

There are a few basic principles that should guide our bank bailout. The plan needs to be transparent, cost the taxpayer as little as possible and focus on getting the banks to start lending again to sectors that create jobs. It goes without saying that any solution should make it less likely, not more likely, that we will have problems in the future.

By these standards, the TARP bailout has so far been a dismal failure. Unbelievably expensive, it has failed to rekindle lending. Former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson gave the banks a big handout; what taxpayers got in return was worth less than two-thirds of what we gave the big banks—and the value of what we got has dropped precipitously since.

Since TARP facilitated the consolidation of banks, the problem of "too big to fail" has become worse, and therefore the

Joseph E. Stiglitz is University Professor at Columbia University. He received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2001 for research on the economics of information.

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excessive risk-taking that it engenders has grown worse. The banks carried on paying out dividends and bonuses and didn't even pretend to resume lending. "Make more *loans*?" John Hope III, chair of Whitney National Bank in New Orleans, said to a room full of Wall Street analysts in November. The taxpayers put out $350 billion and didn't even get the right to find out what the money was being spent on, let alone have a say in what the banks did with it.

TARP's failure comes as no surprise: incentives matter. Bankers won't restart lending unless they have a reason to do so or are forced. Receiving billions of dollars in bonus pay for racking up record losses is a peculiar "incentive" structure. Bankers have been accused of unbounded greed using hard-earned taxpayer dollars for bonuses and dividends, but economists more calmly observe: they were simply responding rationally to the incentives and constraints they faced.

Even if the banks had not poured out the money in bonuses as we were pouring it in, they might not have restarted lending; they might have just hoarded it. Recapitalization enables them to lend. But there is a difference between the ability to lend and the willingness to lend. With the economy plunging into deep recession, the risks of lending are enormous. TARP did nothing to require or create incentives for new lending, focusing instead on cleaning up past mistakes. We need to be forward-looking, reducing the risk of new lending. Just think of what new lending $700 billion could have financed. Leveraged on a modest ten-to-one basis, it could have supported $7 trillion of new lending—more than enough to meet business's requirements.

Flawed Attempts to Restart Lending

Policy-makers have been flailing around, trying to figure out how to get lending restarted. It is not hard to do—if the government bears all or most of the risk. The Federal Reserve is, in effect, making major loans to America's corporate giants, giving them a big advantage over traditional job creators, America's small- and medium-size enterprises. We have no idea if the Fed is doing a good job of assessing risk and whether interest rates commensurate with the risks are being charged. Given the Fed's recent record, there is no reason for confidence. But there is a consensus that whatever the Fed is doing, it is not enough.

The Obama administration has floated a number of ideas, from buying the bad assets and putting them into a "bad bank," leaving it to the government to dispose of them; to providing insurance to the banks; to assisting private investors (like hedge funds) to buy the bad assets, presumably by lending to investors on favorable terms. Because of the lack of details, the market greeted the Obama administration's announcement of its so-called plan with dismay. As this article goes to press, we can only guess that the administration's plan will be an amalgam of several of these ideas. The devil is in the details, and without the details we can't be sure how things will turn out.

An early idea floated by Paulson was for the government to buy the bad assets from the banks. Naturally, Wall Street was delighted with this idea. Who wouldn't want to offload their junk to the government at inflated prices? The banks could get rid of some of these bad assets now, but not at prices they would like. Then there are other assets that the private sector wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. Some of them are liabilities that can explode, eating up government funds like Pac-Man. On September 15 AIG said it was short $20 billion. The next day, its losses had grown to some $85 billion. A little later, when no one was looking, there was a further dole, bringing the total to $150 billion. Then on March 1, the government agreed to another $30 billion in taxpayer money for AIG—the fourth intervention in less than six months.

Paulson's original proposal was thoroughly discredited, as the difficulties of pricing and buying thousands of assets became apparent. More recently a variant of this proposal, which involves government buying garbage in bulk, was broached. But the major difficulty with determining prices of toxic assets, whether singly or in bulk, remains: pay too much and the government will suffer huge losses; pay too little and the hole in the banks' balance sheets will still seem enormous, requiring another bailout to recapitalize the banks.

The 'bad bank,' without nationalization, is a bad idea, another example of the voodoo economics that has marked the financial sector.

Most variants of the "cash for trash" proposal are based on putting the bad assets into a bad bank (advocates of the plan prefer the gentler term "aggregator bank"). But the banks holding only good assets would likely be short of cash, even after taxpayers had vastly overpaid for the trash. The hope is that the banks would then find private funds to further the recapitalization, though one suspects that the sovereign wealth funds, to whom many turned a little while ago, would be less interested, having been so badly burned before.

I believe that the bad bank, without nationalization, is a bad idea. We should reject any plan that involves "cash for trash." It is another example of the voodoo economics that has marked the financial sector—the kind of alchemy that allowed the banks to slice and dice F-rated subprime mortgages into supposedly A-rated securities. Somehow, it is believed that moving the bad assets around into an aggregator bank will create value. But I suspect that Wall Street is enthusiastic about the plan not because bankers believe that government has a comparative advantage in garbage disposal but because they hope for a non-transparent bonanza from the Treasury in the form of high prices for their junk.

If the government takes over banks that don't meet the minimum capital requirements, placing them in federal conservatorship, then these pricing problems are no longer important. Under this scenario, pricing is just an accounting entry between two pockets of the government. Whether the government finds it useful to gather all the bad assets into a bad bank is a matter of management: Norway chose not to; Sweden chose to. But Sweden wasn't foolish enough to try to buy bad assets from private banks, as many in America are advocating. It was only

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under government ownership of the entire bank that the bad bank was created. Norway's experience was perhaps somewhat better, but the circumstances were different. Given the complexity and scale of the mess Wall Street has gotten us into, I suspect we will want to gather the problems together, net out the derivative positions (something that will be much easier to do under conservatorship and a significant achievement in its own right, with major benefits in risk reduction) and eventually restructure and dispose of the assets.

More recently, another idea has been put forward: the government would insure bank losses. By removing the risk of loss, the value of these toxic assets automatically increases, improving the banks' balance sheets. Bankers love this idea. The government can give them a big insurance policy at a small premium. Politicians love this idea too: there is at least a chance they will be out of Washington before the bills come due.

But that's precisely the problem with this approach: we won't know for years what it would do to the government's balance sheet. Six months ago, what the banks told us about their losses going forward was totally off the mark. AIG had to revise its losses by tens of billions of dollars within days. Real estate prices might fall only another 5 percent, or they could fall another 25 percent. With the insurance proposal, neither the government nor the banks have to admit the size of the hole in the banks' balance sheets. It's another example of those nontransparent transactions that got Wall Street into trouble.

Even worse, the insurance proposal exacerbates incentive distortions—it moves us from a zero-sum world into a negative-sum world, where increased taxpayer losses are greater than Wall Street's gains. The insurance proposal may even inhibit banks from restructuring mortgages, worsening the problem that gave rise to the crisis in the first place. If they restructure the mortgage, they have to book a loss. If they keep the mortgage and things get worse (the likely scenario), the taxpayer picks up most of the downside risk; but if things get better and prices improve, the banks keep the gains.

Still worse are proposals to try to enlist the private sector to buy the trash. Right now, the prices the private sector is willing to pay are so low that the banks aren't interested—it would make apparent the size of the hole in banks' balance sheets. But if the government insures private-sector investors—and even makes loans at favorable terms—they'll be willing to pay a higher price. With enough insurance and favorable enough loan terms, presto! We can make our banks solvent.

But there is a sleight-of-hand here: go back to the zero-sum principle. The private sector is not going to provide money for nothing. It expects a return for providing capital and bearing risk. But its cost of capital is far higher than that of government. The losses are real, and the private sector won't bear them without full compensation. This means that the amount the government is likely to have to pay in the end is all the greater.

This proposal, like so many others emanating from the banking community, is based partially on the hope that if banks make things sufficiently complex and nontransparent, no one will notice the gift to the banking sector until it is too late. It appears as if they are at last getting the high market prices that they hoped they would get all along. But it would be a misnomer to call these market prices, since the government has taken away the downside risk. This proposal has, of course, the further advantage of drumming up support from the hedge funders, who so far have not received any of the TARP bonanza.

There is an underlying problem facing all these proposals: the hole in the banks' balance sheets is bigger than the $700 billion Congress has approved—and much of what has been spent so far has been wasted. So the financial wizards are turning to tried and true gimmicks—the same ones that got us into the mess. One strategy is to hide the costs in nontransparent accounting (easier under the insurance proposal). The other combines this trickery with the magic of leveraging and pretends that leveraging carries no risk. The government sets up a "special investment vehicle" using, say, $100 billion of TARP as the "equity." It then borrows another $900 billion from the Fed—which in rapid succession has been tripling and quadrupling its balance sheet. Of course, in doing so the Fed is risking taxpayers' money—but without having to ask permission of Congress. At best, this is a deliberate circumvention of democratic processes.

The underlying problem facing all these proposals is that the hole in the banks' balance sheets is bigger than the $700 billion bailout.

Is There an Alternative?

Firms often get into trouble—accumulating more debt than they can repay. There is a time-honored way of resolving the problem, called "financial reorganization," or bankruptcy. Bankruptcy scares many people, but it shouldn't. All that happens is that the financial claims on the firm get restructured. When the firm is in very bad trouble, the shareholders get wiped out, and the bondholders become the new shareholders. When things are less serious, some of the debt is converted into equity. In any case, without the burden of monthly debt payments, the firm can return to profitability. America is lucky in having a particularly effective way of giving firms a fresh start—Chapter 11 of our bankruptcy code, which has been used repeatedly, for example, by the airlines. Airplanes keep flying; jobs and assets are preserved. Under new management, and without the burden of debt, the airline can go on making a contribution to our society.

Banks differ in only one respect. The failure of a bank results in particular hardship to depositors and can lead to broader problems in the economy. These are among the reasons that the government has provided deposit insurance. But this means that when banks fail, the government comes in to pick up the pieces—and this is different from when the local pizza parlor fails. Worse still, long experience has taught us that when banks

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are at risk of failure, their managers engage in behaviors that risk losing even more taxpayer money. They may, for instance, undertake big bets: if they win, they keep the proceeds; if they lose, so what?—they would have died anyway. That's why we have laws that say when a bank's capital is low, it should be shut down. We don't wait for the till to be empty. Because the government is on the hook for so much money, it has to take an active role in managing the restructuring; even in the case of airline bankruptcy, courts typically appoint someone to oversee the restructuring to make sure that the claimants' interests are served.

Usually, the process is done smoothly. The government finds a healthy bank to take over the failed bank. To get the healthy bank to do this, it often has to "fill in the hole," making up for the difference between the value of what the bank owes depositors and the value of the bank's assets. It's no different from an ordinary takeover or merger, except the government facilitates the process. Typically, in the process, shareholders get wiped out, and often the government and/or private investors may put in additional money.

One proposal entails the creation of a 'Good Bank'; rather than dump the bad assets on the government, we strip out the good assets.

Occasionally, the government can't find a healthy bank to take over the failed bank. Then it has to take over the failed bank itself. Usually, it restructures the bank, shutting down many of the branches and lending departments with particularly bad track records. Then it sells the bank. We can call this "temporary nationalization" if we want. But whatever we call it, it's no big deal. Not surprisingly, the banks are trying to scare us into believing that it would be the end of the world as we know it. Of course, it can be done badly (Lehman Brothers, for example). But there are far more examples of it being done well.

The current situation is only slightly different. There are few healthy banks to take over the very many unhealthy banks, and the banks are in such a mess—and the economy is in such a downturn—that we don't really know how much money would be needed. We don't know if claims by depositors are greater than the value of assets, and if so, by how much. The banks may claim, If we hold the assets long enough, and if the real estate market recovers, and if our recession isn't too deep or long, then we can meet all our obligations. We are "solvent." We just can't get the cash we need.

Those are big ifs. That's why governments typically make judgments based on market values. Right now, the suspicion is that the banks don't meet their capital requirements with current market values, let alone the market values in the future, as real estate prices continue to fall and the downturn gets worse. (If banks don't have enough capital, we would give them short notice: either come up with additional capital, or you can't continue to operate as you are. We either find someone to take you over, or we run you, restructure and sell.)

The banks obviously don't want the government to play by the rules. They want to delay the day of reckoning. They want what is called forbearance. They say, Allow us a little slack now, because we are fundamentally sound. Of course they would say that. Of course banks claim that market prices underestimate true values. We learned the hard way in the S&L crisis, however, that delay is very costly. We are on track to learn that lesson again.

The Obama administration seems to be proposing a way out of this muddle: we will "stress test." We will see how well you fare. If you pass the test, we will help you get out of your temporary difficulties. Stress testing involves using mathematical models to see what happens under various scenarios. The banks were supposed to have been stress testing themselves on an ongoing basis. Their models said everything was fine and dandy.

We know those models failed. What we don't know is whether the models the administration will use will be any better. Will they use the old, failed models? We have been told that it will take time to do the stress test, and while we wait, will we pour more money into failing institutions, with good money chasing bad, ever widening our national debt. We know, too, that the worst-case scenarios that will be used in the stress test are nowhere near the worst-case scenarios that some economists are depicting—implying that even banks that pass the stress test may need more funding down the line.

Gradually America is realizing that we must do something—now. We already have a framework for dealing with banks whose capital is inadequate. We should use it, and quickly, with perhaps some modifications to take care of the unusual nature of today's problems. There are several ways we can proceed. One innovative proposal (variants of which have been floated by Willem Buiter at the London School of Economics and by George Soros) entails the creation of a Good Bank. Rather than dump the bad assets on the government, we would strip out the good assets—those that can be easily priced. If the value of claims by depositors and other claims that we decide need to be protected is less than the value of the assets, then the government would write a check to the Old Bank (we could call it the Bad Bank). If the reverse is true, then the government would have a senior claim on the Old Bank. In normal times, it would be easy to recapitalize the Good Bank privately. These are not normal times, so the government might have to run the bank for a while.

Meanwhile, the Old Bank would be left with the task of disposing of its toxic assets as best it can. Because the Old Bank's capital is inadequate, it couldn't take deposits, unless it found enough capital privately to recapitalize itself. How much shareholders and bondholders got would depend on how well management did in disposing of these assets—and how well they did in ensuring that management didn't overpay itself.

The Good Bank proposal has the advantage of avoiding the N-word: nationalization. Some believe a more polite term, "conservatorship" as it was called in the case of Fannie Mae, may be more palatable. It should be clear, though, that whatever it is

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called, the Good Bank proposal entails little more than playing by longstanding rules, a variant of standard practices to deal with firms whose liabilities exceed their assets.

Those who say the government cannot be trusted to allocate capital efficiently sound unconvincing these days. After all, it's not as though the private sector did a very good job. No peacetime government has wasted resources on the scale of America's private financial system. Wall Street's incentives structures were designed to encourage shortsighted and excessively risky behavior. The bankers were supposed to understand risk, but they did not understand the most elementary principles of information asymmetry, risk correlation and fat-tailed distributions. Most of them, while they may have been ethically challenged, were really guided in their behavior by the perverse incentives they championed. The result was that they did not even serve their shareholders well; from 2004 to 2008, net profits of many of the major banks were negative.

There is every reason to believe that a temporarily nationalized bank will behave much better—even if most of the employees are still the same—simply because we will have changed the perverse incentives. Besides, a government-run bank might spend some time and money teaching its employees about risk management, good lending practices, social responsibility and ethics. The experience elsewhere, including in the Scandinavian countries, shows that the whole process can be done well—and when the economy is eventually restored to prosperity, the profitable banks can be returned to the private sector. What is required is not rocket science. Banks simply need to get back to what they were supposed to do: lending money, on a prudent basis, to businesses and households, based not just on collateral but on a good assessment of the use to which borrowers will put the money and their ability to repay it.

Meanwhile, there needs to be an orderly plan for disposing of the old bad assets. There is no magic in moving them around from one owner to another. In some countries, government agencies (often hiring private subcontractors) have done a good job of selling off the assets. Other countries (including some hit in the East Asia crisis a decade ago) have had an unfortunate experience, bringing in investment banks and hedge funds to dispose of their assets. These institutions simply held them for the short time it took the economy to recover and made a huge capital gain at the expense of the country's taxpayers. To add insult to injury, some even took advantage of tax havens to avoid paying taxes on those huge profits. These experiences suggest caution in turning to hedge funds and other investment firms.

Every downturn comes to an end. Eventually we will be able to sell the restructured banks at a good price—though, one hopes, not one based on the irrational exuberant expectation of another financial bubble. The notion that we will make a profit from the bailouts—which the financial sector tried to convince us were "investments"—seems to have dropped from public discourse. But at least we can use the proceeds of the eventual sale of the restructured banks to pay down the huge deficit that this financial debacle will have brought onto our nation. ■

Lessons From Latin America

The region's social movements are a useful model for U.S. leftists wanting to influence Obama.

by BENJAMIN DANGL

Rain poured down in La Paz, Bolivia, the day Barack Obama gave his inauguration speech. But the weather didn't stop thousands of Bolivians from marching in the streets in support of a new constitution, a document set to grant unprecedented rights to the country's indigenous majority.

As chants and the explosions of Roman candles from marchers echoed throughout this capital city, Obama looked out from the television screen in a La Paz bar, offering words of wisdom that were somehow connected to many Bolivians' sense that democracy and good politics depended on a mobilized public taking to the streets.

"For as much as government can do and must do," Obama said, "it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies."

Similarly, it has been the "faith and determination" of Bolivian social movements in their fight for a better world that paved the way to the election of indigenous President Evo Morales, and then pushed him to nationalize gas reserves, redistribute land to poor farmers and enshrine long-overdue rights in a rewritten constitution. The juxtaposition of Obama's orderly inauguration and the near-constant street mobilizations in La Paz brings us to the question: what can US activists facing economic crisis and a potential ally in the White House learn from South America's social movements?

The region's shift to the left—from leaders in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador to the more moderate presidents in Brazil, Chile and Argentina—has grabbed headlines in recent years. But often overlooked is the role social movements and unions have played in ushering these leaders into power, and once they are there, radicalizing their politics. Other movements throughout the region never waited for allies in the government palace, and instead built their new worlds out of the neoliberal wreckage of the old. As unemployment skyrockets in the United States, and the challenges of cleaning up the mess of the Bush years commences, US activists could apply the successful strategies of South American social movements.

Ida Peñarada, a Bolivian water-rights activist living in Co-

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chabamba, understands the hopes and horizons of social movements. She participated in Cochabamba's 2000 Water War, a popular uprising that kicked out Bechtel, a multinational company that had privatized the water in everything from communally built wells to rain cisterns. Many citizens from across the economic spectrum couldn't afford the exorbitant rates set by the company, so they joined together in protests and road blockades, sending Bechtel packing and putting the water back into public hands.

Peñarada compares the Water War, and the ongoing challenges of managing the public water system, to the current situation among US activists under the Obama administration. "It's important to think about how to take advantage of fresh energy, of the yearning for change that exists…and to not let what is urgent block out what is important for the long run. This involves not just enjoying the passing glory but planning for the future, involving everyone you can."

JAMIL BITTAR/REUTERS

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement protests President Lula da Silva's agricultural policies in Brasília in 2007.

The challenge for many Bolivian activists in the Water War, as well as other social movements leading up to the election of Morales, was, as many movement leaders explained to me, moving from a position of "protests to proposals." This isn't to say that movements in the United States should subordinate themselves to the Obama administration. On the contrary, radicalizing Obama's politics should go hand in hand with building alternatives locally, outside the reach of the federal government.

Such has been the case with Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST). This movement, operating in a country with one of the most unequal distributions of land in the world, is made up of landless farmers who occupy unused land and work it to survive. When President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva failed to follow through on long-promised land reforms, the MST didn't waver; the movement continued its land occupations. Over the course of the MST's twenty-five years of work, it has expropriated some 35 million acres, land that is now occupied by roughly a million families. The settlements, which are cooperatively organized, are home to hundreds of MST-built schools, which have enabled tens of thousands of people to read and write.

One positive example of the relationship between citizens' movements and the Brazilian government is participatory budgeting. In the early 1990s participatory budgeting was implemented by the Workers' Party in Porto Alegre. This process involves thousands of residents gathering to decide how government funding should be used for city projects and development. Michael Fox, a Brazil-based journalist and coproducer of the documentary *Beyond Elections: Redefining Democracy in the Americas*, asks, "What if the $700 billion bank bailout in the US incorporated a component of Brazil's participatory budgeting, in which US citizens decided where they wanted the bailout funds to be allocated? Following Brazil's standards, citizens would then follow up to ensure that the funds actually went to where they were supposed to go."

Tens of thousands of communal councils around Venezuela also make sure government funds are used efficiently and transparently. Each communal council is made up of dozens of families who develop local projects, such as road building and electricity and water services. The council identifies the need, then develops a project proposal for the government. The government in turn finances the project.

These communal councils are only part of what democratizes the Venezuelan government under President Hugo Chávez. "There are movements in Venezuela that support Chávez but are at the same time critical," Fox explains, mentioning the Ezequiel Zamora National Campesino Front and the National Association of Free and Alternative Community Media. "These movements have an agenda rooted in the grassroots, and the president, albeit friendly, is going to have another; there are many interests at the top. Often a president—whether it's Chávez or Obama—isn't going to be able to do what he or she would like without hearing it from the people on the streets."

"The issue is not to radicalize the politics of Obama but to strengthen the movements," says Uruguayan political analyst and social movement adviser Raúl Zibechi. "The relation with progressive governments can only strengthen us, the movements, if we have very clear ideas. If not, we can expect nothing from the governments."

When Franklin Roosevelt was elected in 1932, he was far from being a leftist. The most progressive of FDR's policies were the result of grassroots pressure from below. According to widely cited legend, he once told labor constituents who were demanding radical reforms, "I agree with you, I want to do it, now make me do it." Historian Howard Zinn wrote of that relationship, "Where organized labor was strong, Roosevelt moved to make some concessions to working people."

Now is the time for activists in the United States to run with Obama's rhetoric when he says, "We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." A movement put Obama in office. Now it's time to make Obama follow the movement. ■

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America Is #… 15?

Because of income inequality, the U.S. scores poorly on a new index of general well-being.

by DALTON CONLEY

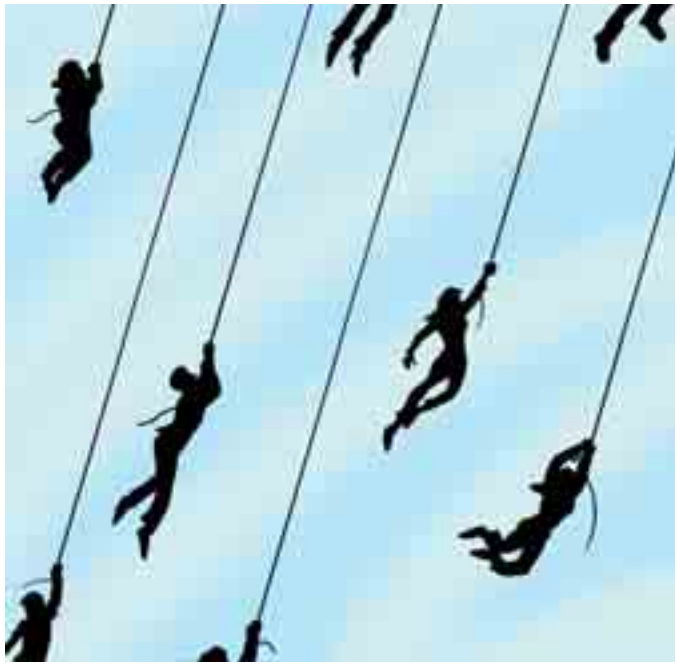
The president's proposed budget will do much to bring progressivity back to the tax code. Upper-income households—which have gained the most over the past three decades—will contribute around 80 percent of federal revenues, and more modest incomes will finally catch some real tax relief. Meanwhile, the vast majority of Americans have applauded the administration's move to impose limits on executive compensation by attaching strings to bailout money. The reason is one of basic fairness, of course. But it turns out that limiting the windfalls of the few may actually be good for us all. That's because there appears to be a relationship in the United States between inequality—which is largely driven by an explosive rise in incomes at the top—and overall levels of human development.

In the ticker tape of economic bad news, there is perhaps one dire statistic that has not gotten as much attention as it deserves: the American Human Development Index (HDI), released for the first time last year. The American HDI is especially troubling because it puts all this economic gloom and doom in stark human terms. And the results are somewhat surprising: in good times as well as bad, in terms of aggregate health, education, purchasing power, security and general well-being, we have been in decline.

The HDI has long been used by experts and officials concerned with advancement in poor countries. In 1990 Mahbub ul Haq—a former World Bank official who had also served as Pakistani finance minister—created the indicator to capture the actual experiences of people in a given country or region in a way that GDP and other indicators of economically measurable output could not.

With some slight adjustments, the index was retrofitted to work for rich countries. The score consists of three dimensions: health, as measured by life expectancy at birth; access to knowledge, captured by educational enrollment and attainment; and income, as reflected by median earnings for the working-age population. And now the results are finally in.

The first bit of bad news is that America was slipping well before our most recent downturn. Whereas during the 1980s we were consistently No. 2 in the world (Switzerland occupied the top slot in 1980, while Canada did from 1985 to 1990), by the mid-1990s we had slipped to six. And by 2006 (the most recent year available), we had even fallen out of the Top 10 (to slot 15). Income clearly doesn't capture every dimension, since the United States still holds the No. 2 position in terms of income per capita. Rather, other aspects of American society make it less "developed" than it should be, given the resources available here.



JANNA BROWER

This decline proceeded apace through the Reagan and first Bush administrations, during the go-go Clinton '90s, and through the regime of George W. Bush. We have slipped in periods of budget deficits and during the largest surplus in US history. So something deeper about the structure of American society is probably responsible.

Of course, there are some pretty good suspects. There is, for example, the issue of nearly 50 million people who don't have health insurance. There is the fact that college completion rates have been flat since the '70s despite an increasingly technological economy. And there is the wage stagnation for the bottom half, a problem that has dogged us since the oil shock of 1973. But there is one larger force underlying these trends that has been gaining steam over the past three decades, and that's income inequality.

Income inequality has been rising since the late '60s and is greater in the United States than in any other developed (i.e., rich) country. Income inequality can matter for general health, knowledge and our shared standard of living, for several reasons. First, the more that Americans have vastly different economic means at their disposal, the harder it is to generate political support for investments that would raise all boats. For instance, inequality often leads well-to-do people to abandon the public school system—or to move to particularly well-

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funded districts, where house prices are highest. Some scholars even posit that high inequality harms our health, as a result of the stress from relative deprivation and increased efforts to keep up with the Joneses (or, as the case may be, the Gateses). While this claim remains highly controversial among health economists, the observation that more-unequal countries generally display worse health than more-equal ones is not in dispute. Such high (and rising) degrees of inequality in the United States (we are closer to Turkey on such measures than we are to France) are reflected in the HDI scores. Some Americans are a full fifty years behind others in terms of their level of development.

Yet the relationship between inequality and overall HDI scores is not straightforward. For example, state-level inequality is not a reliable predictor. The District of Columbia, New York and Connecticut all have high levels of inequality—and are among the richest regions—yet perform at the top in their American HDI scores. On the other hand, another rich state, California, boasts three out of the top five Congressional districts in terms of HDI (including Silicon Valley, West Los Angeles and West Orange County) while also bearing the shame of the worst district in the United States (Kings County in the Central Valley, which includes Fresno). Kings County is further behind in human development terms than any district in rural Mississippi; it is equivalent to the US average during the 1970s, and it isn't comparable to the scores of any of the rich countries we like to think of as our peers.

These differences—even among rich states—probably reflect distinct policy choices about how to invest in children and families. For instance, California—held hostage by Proposition 13, which has limited property taxes over the last three decades—is among the bottom half of spenders on K-12 education, despite having a diverse population with great needs in terms of English as a Second Language and related services. Meanwhile, New York spends more per pupil than any other state, and the District of Columbia and Connecticut are not far behind. In other words, educational investment might act as a bulwark against inequality's pernicious effects on human development.

Putting inequality in human development terms captures the cost to our collective future better than GDP, income or other abstract measures can, even—or especially—in perilous economic times such as these. And such a framework makes clear that if we want America to be "number one," it is more a matter of pulling up the bottom than of continuing to concentrate gains at the top. Until we deal with the rising tide of inequality we will not lift all boats—recovery or no recovery. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

return these territories to Bulgaria after the war and placed them under Bulgarian administration for its duration. But when Hitler then demanded the deportation of another 20,000 Jews from "old" Bulgaria proper, there was such a furious outcry from the Bulgarian church, Parliament and non-Jewish citizens that Czar Boris is thought to have said to an enraged Hitler something like, Sorry, Adolf, but I need my Jews to build roads. Thus, able-bodied Jewish men were sent to labor camps in the countryside. It was from one of these that Wagenstein escaped and returned to Sofia, where he engaged in sabotage with a partisan group and was arrested, tortured and sentenced to death. Upon the arrival of the Red Army, he was freed from prison and joined a theater group that entertained Soviet troops on the Ukrainian front. He went on to study screenwriting in Moscow and has had an illustrious career in Bulgaria as one of its foremost screenwriters and novelists.

Not one of Bulgaria's 48,000 Jews was sent to a death camp.

Elizabeth Frank
Deliana Simeonova
Translators, Farewell, Shanghai *and* Isaac's Torah

Paris in the Springtime

New York City

Scott Sherman's "In His League" [Feb. 2], about George Plimpton, paints a good picture of a great lightweight and raises serious questions about just what Peter Matthiessen got up to in the CIA (even if, nowadays, it's hard not to feel a bit nostalgic for a time when any branch of the government took such a lively interest in the arts). It's a pity, however, that in the interest, apparently, of journalistic color, Sherman introduces Harold "Doc" Humes as a "mentally unbalanced former Navy cook" remarkable chiefly for traipsing around Paris in a wool suit and homburg even in the hottest weather. Humes eventually lost his mind, but he was perfectly sane when he was in Paris in the '50s, and it was the practical and literary savvy he'd developed as publisher and editor of the *Paris News Post* that made it possible for him and Matthiessen and Plimpton to start *The Paris Review*. Humes also went on to write two novels, *Underground City* and *Men Die*, both recently republished and still very much worth reading. And though he may well have cooked in the Navy, he also studied at MIT and graduated from Harvard.

Edwin Frank

Rome in the Fall

New York City

"Italy's New Racism" by Frederika Randall [Feb. 2] focuses on the surge of xenophobia the right-wing government has been silently condoning. While it is important to emphasize these appalling episodes, it is also crucial to learn that as the article went to press, news came from Italy that four of the city policemen who beat up and humiliated the Ghanaian student were put under house arrest and charged with kidnapping, slander and abuse of power, and dismissed from their posts.

As for the still popular "obscenely jolly Fascist song," Randall does not recall that after it was released in 1936—at the time of the attack on Ethiopia, the only Italian attempt at colonialism—"Faccetta Nera" was subsequently prohibited by the Fascist authorities after they realized that the catchy melody actually encouraged an all-too-predictable mixture of the races.

Marcello Simonetta

Emendation—'Betrayal'

In Eyal Press's "Betrayal" [March 9] no mention was made of the translator of the book under review, *Writing in the Dark*, by David Grossman. She is Jessica Cohen.

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Books & the Arts.

CATHERINE HÉLIE/© GALLIMARD

Jonathan Littell

A Nazi Zelig

by SAMUEL MOYN

Jonathan Littell's novel *The Kindly Ones* took France by storm in the fall of 2006, when it won the Prix Goncourt—the nation's most prestigious literary prize—and sold many hundreds of thousands of copies. Commercial success fed the heat of scandal, which followed the book to Germany in 2008, vaulting it to the top of the bestseller list. The furor revolved around nothing less than the governing conceit of Littell's thousand-page *roman-fleuve*: the novel pretends to be the memoir of a Nazi SS officer who witnessed the different stages of the Holocaust as it was being perpetrated. The dispute over the book was another round in the cycle of Holocaust controversies that have marked time since the end of World War II with the regularity of a metronome. Tempestuous quarrels may have raised public consciousness about the Holocaust; but even so, subsequent battles over its representation can feel no less unseemly. "Silence over the murder, scandal over the books," George Steiner worried in response to one of the first such imbroglios, forty years before Littell's intentionally sickening but unquestionably brilliant success.

Born in 1967, Jonathan Littell is an American, the son of Robert Littell, himself the author of a series of espionage thrillers (his latest, *The Stalin Epigram*, will be published in May). Apart from his time as an undergraduate at Yale, Littell *fils* has lived as an expatriate in Western Europe. Though *The Kindly Ones* was labeled his "first literary work," he had tried his hand after college at his own brand of potboiler, one based on cyberpunk instead of cold war intrigue. But unlike his father, Littell writes in French, and in *The Kindly Ones* he uses an impeccable literary style that—despite a few purists who feigned offense at one or two *anglicismes*, not to mention the whole idea of an American scaling the pinnacle of French literature—has garnered deserved praise. After finishing college, Littell chose a career with the NGO Action Against Hunger. It was his humanitarian work in the killing fields of Bosnia and Chechnya during the 1990s, he explained in interviews following the publication of *The Kindly Ones*, that led him to quit his job and turn to literature. He focused on the Nazis as the archetype of modern evil and plunged into years of research on their deeds.

The Kindly Ones
By Jonathan Littell.
Translated by Charlotte Mandell.
Harper. 983 pp. $29.99.

The device of the Nazi narrator is not unprecedented: John Hawkes's *The Cannibal* (1949) was among the first novels in English to use it, and the various attempts in French include a prior winner of the Prix Goncourt, Michel Tournier's *The Ogre* (1970). But in Littell's hands, it is used in a new and inflationary way, allowing the novel to track the stages and sites of the genocide of the Jews from beginning to end, and with a degree of detail that lends authority to the tale. Maximilien Aue, Littell's protagonist, is present in the Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing units that began the ethnic cleansing of the East behind the lines of the Wehrmacht's

Samuel Moyn, author of A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France, *teaches history at Columbia University.*

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invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. A year and a half later, after a brief and eventful interlude in Stalingrad, Aue fetches up in Berlin, where as a functionary on Heinrich Himmler's staff he visits Auschwitz and the Operation Reinhard death camps, which become the factories of the "final solution" when the primitive methods of shooting Jews are supplanted by the technically evolved elimination through gassing and cremation. In 1943 Aue hears Himmler's chilling Posen speech, in which the Reichsführer-SS speaks of the Holocaust's glory in an almost public setting; and in 1944 he travels to Hungary, to be present while Adolf Eichmann condemns the nation's Jews to a massive paroxysm of death. Toward the end of the novel, Aue follows the death marches in the winter of 1945, the catastrophic months of the regime's collapse. And in the book's closing pages, he encounters Adolf Hitler in his bunker. Aue is a Nazi Zelig.

It is the implausible fact that Aue is everywhere that European critics attacked most frequently. Claude Lanzmann, whose film *Shoah* apparently piqued Littell's interest in the era, acknowledged that *The Kindly Ones* is learned but complained that it is not a persuasive memoir of one man—even a fictional man. Instead, Lanzmann alleged, it is more a ventriloquism of the history books Littell read while researching the era, which are precisely not one man's experience. In other words, no such Nazi ever existed. That objection made little sense, for what is a novel but a work of fiction, and what is a character but a fabrication? Implicit in Lanzmann's narrow dismissal, however, is a narrower question: whether this monstrosity of a novel ought to be read simply or even primarily as a compendium of facts—as a vivid summary of, or accessible proxy for, the frequently dreary books of historians.

I tend to doubt it, even though Littell is a gifted writer and what he achieves in fluently portraying the main characteristics of the SS "state within a state" during the war is unparalleled, to my knowledge. His depiction of the confusing summer and fall after the Soviet invasion—when the SS came to grips with its "special tasks"—is particularly interesting. (Less so, perhaps, is the mammoth narration in the novel's longest section of the SS's attempt to square its mission to eradicate the Jews with pressure to make the Reich's Eastern acquisitions economically productive, or at least useful in the war effort.) The details are assured throughout, and—despite the irritation of some European historians—Littell is rather impressively up to date; at times the novel reads like a fictional précis of the most recent scholarly research on the Third Reich. To take just one example, Aue's scattered reflections on the Soviet invasion as a colonial project, and how it might compare with its American, British and French precedents, comport with my colleague Mark Mazower's masterful *Hitler's Empire*, published last year.

If Littell is so scrupulous about period details, it's not merely for the sake of the facts.

But in the end, no matter how absorbing, Littell's thousand pages are hardly an easy or obvious substitute for historical scholarship or narrative history. The chronicle Aue presents is told from his idiosyncratic and self-interested point of view; more important, it is entangled with his wholly fictional—and perhaps even more gripping—personal story. There is too much else going on for "real" history to be the main event. At two critical junctures the jaded Aue suspends his narration of what he saw—"these camps have been amply described in the historical literature, better than I could do," he sighs at one point, leaving aside any description of the bulk of the killing apparatus—and these pauses prove beyond any doubt that the catastrophic history of the era is the occasion for a deeper and more complex fictional stratagem. If the novel needs to be so scrupulous in its period details and so generous in its scope, it is not merely for the sake of the facts.

The other main charge against *The Kindly Ones*—pressed in a book-length French screed amusingly entitled *The Complacent Ones* as well as in the almost unanimously scathing German reviews—is that it is sensationalistic and voyeuristic. Actually, almost no violence is depicted in the novel, at least outside Aue's family. There are a few horrifying scenes at the outset: Aue is present at the slaughter of Jews at Babi Yar, near Kiev, in 1941; he even participates in it for an hour, but it is expected of all officers present and he does so with regret. Otherwise, there is no Jew-killing narrated in the novel; Aue is a vicious murderer but not of Jews, and he is not totally convinced they deserve their fate. The few times he directly encounters Jew-killing, Aue expresses distaste at the sadism of the SS rank and file, and denounces it as an insufficiently high-concept version of Nazi thinking. After Stalingrad, Aue is not even a so-called *Schreibtischtäter*, wielding memos as a deadly weapon. He has mixed relations with Eichmann's horrific machinery in another part of the SS bureaucracy and then takes special care to reject Hannah Arendt's thesis of the "banality of evil," even as an explanation of Eichmann personally. Far from being a portrait of a "thoughtless" automaton, Eichmann's case illustrates, Aue says, the ethos of the typical middle manager eager to advance by pleasing his bureaucratic masters, even though he could never formulate aims of his own and privately disagrees with the vile orders he is given to execute.

No, the novel stands—or falls—on its portrayal of Max Aue, reflecting on European history from the vantage of his private National Socialism while hiding in a redoubt in provincial France. (His precise means of survival after the war, so that he could reinvent himself as an anonymous businessman, is a mystery saved for the last page.) More precisely, what has to be defended for the novel to merit the laurels that have been bestowed upon it is Littell's attempt to correlate Aue's personal trajectory with the broader history he narrates and his appalling personal deed with the grandiose historical crime he watches unfold.

One interesting defense of the novel, offered by Littell's French editor and also advanced by Harvard literature professor Susan Rubin Suleiman, is that *The Kindly Ones* is a pioneering experiment in making a Nazi an ethical "witness" despite himself. According to this view, Aue, though definitely a participant in terrible crimes, is forced into inadvertent moral insight about the evil in which he is embroiled. Even the perpetrator, Suleiman suggests, ought to be seen as a potential source of unwitting testimony to the enormity of the crimes the Nazis committed.

The argument has something to recommend it, but in the end it's unpersuasive because it can't account for much of the novel's plot. True, Aue is led to bitter reflections about how his Nazification has changed him into "a man who can't see a forest without thinking about a mass grave." But such moments of introspection are few and far between, and absent from the climactic episodes of the book. A world-weary cynic, Aue learns little or nothing that he does not already know in the depths of his soul about

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the worst human conduct, which he is generally reconciled to; and if he is scandalized by the barbarity he sees, it is typically because of its unprofessional extremes rather than the appalling nature of the acts. In the opening pages, supposedly written long after the fact, Aue presents his memoirs as exculpatory; but if the point of the novel is to track its narrator's moral awakening, the scarcity of moments of soul-searching hardly justifies it.

The real aim of the book, which is as fascinating as it is dubious, is to present a theory of Aue's depravity as a miniature of the wickedness of the regime he served. It begins negatively, as Aue—whose story hardly figures in the long opening section—witnesses a thousand incidents, from the mundane to the appalling, over hundreds of pages, and the reader is privy to his reflections on the regime. Aue often considers whether the Nazis were anti-Semites. Of course they were, but fanaticism was for brutes. Were they sadists? Only a few bad apples. Were they servants of power as an end in itself, who saw justice as something to define through power rather than something to constrain it? Yes, but why construct this reality rather than that one? Were the excesses due to submission to the will of the Führer, something so inscrutable that one had to guess at and "work toward" it? Probably, but this explanation too begs the question. Did they really believe their crackpot theory of Aryan racial origins and superiority? To a striking degree, in their everyday assumptions, but often simply because it was the official view or because they were rewarded for honoring it. And didn't they believe the Jews controlled Communism or were acting as dangerous partisans behind the lines? People said such things, even about women and children, but to do so with a straight face was difficult: "as in the Middle Ages," Aue comments, "we were reasoning with syllogisms that proved each other." So did the Nazis do what they did because they were the kind of "ordinary men" who conform in every society? For the shock troops, undoubtedly—"the real danger for mankind is me, is you," Aue reflects—but not in National Socialism's driving causation. The banality of evil is only the last argument to be rejected or seriously qualified. The first few hundred pages of the novel, in which death is general all over Eastern Europe, is also the graveyard of theories.

Aue, and perhaps the reader, is brought quickly to the conclusion that the extremity of the violence is no easy puzzle. "If I could understand it," Aue concludes, "then I'd understand everything and could finally rest." And so, having cleared space for his own conjectures, Littell erects an alternative scheme. It is psychosexual—in the train of a long tradition of such theories—and is staged in Aue's inner visions and dreams, the external atmospherics of his world and his familial drama, which climaxes in a dreadful crime at the center of the novel.

At all of these levels, the novel teems with erudite allusions, beginning with classical sources, which are in turn refracted through recent intellectual currents deeply embedded in the novel's orchestration. The novel's title is the euphemistic moniker for the Furies of Greek mythology and the title of the third part of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* sequence. In Aeschylus' telling, the Erinyes, or Furies, are forced by Athena's intervention in their relentless pursuit of Orestes for killing his mother to become the "Eumenides," or kindly ones, and join her in generously acquitting him of his crime. Indeed, the bare facts of the *Oresteia* provide the template for the specific acts Aue commits, and the defensive contrition of his preface certainly indicates that he expects a similar act of redemption.

Can Aue's depravity stand in as a miniature of the wickedness of the regime he served?

Littell updates these classical themes by recalibrating their dynamics with psychoanalytic theories, especially the unclassifiable German thinker Klaus Theweleit's old and generally forgotten analysis of the psychology of fascism. (Theweleit became the chief German defender of *The Kindly Ones* and a pen pal with its author.) A generation ago, Theweleit published *Male Fantasies*, which analyzed the inner lives of the Freikorps, a group of soldiers who refused to demobilize after World War I and formed paramilitary units to put down the socialist revolution whose specter briefly haunted German cities. (Aue's father, not coincidentally, was a Freikorps officer.) Theweleit's theory focused—rather impressively at the time—on the psychic, lived reality of reactionaries. He highlighted, most of all, their desperate attempt to expunge any traces of femininity from their being, to achieve an impermeable "armored" body that would repel the miasma of pestilence and infirmity they attributed to the revolutionary left. Theweleit's influence shows most of all in the "atmospherics" of *The Kindly Ones*: in Aue's constant, striking immersion in viscous fluids—mud and his own shit, above all, but also vomit and semen. Far more than any explicit killing, it is the almost constant eruption and flow of greasy putrescence that saturates these pages with an inescapable feeling of nausea and abjection.

Yet Littell just as clearly wants to apply Theweleit's meditations on the psychosexual roots of reactionary politics to the Nazi era—and to a deeper syndrome. Another title for *The Kindly Ones*, given this aspiration, might have been *Female Fantasies*. For Aue, the goal is anything but to expel the feminine; it is to revel in and return to the feminine, and the various strands of his life are all dyed in the hue of this wish. Indeed, he has an intuitive understanding of Theweleit's discoveries before their time, and the femininity that could "wreck" men's "dominion" and "dissolve their control," so secretly feared by Theweleit's fascists, is precisely the self-loss that Aue consciously seeks.

Above all, the plot's fundamental motor, and the heart of Aue's quest, is his incestuous passion for his twin sister, Una. Aue's homosexuality is one feature of his governing fantasy to rejoin his sister, even to be her, or perhaps to return to their enwombed unity. Aue hates his mother for breaking up his love affair with his sister (and for driving away their father). But other passages indicate that Aue's melancholic longing for Una is fixated on something early and metaphysical and not late and sexual. In an aside during his work for Himmler, Aue confesses to missing "that other life that could have been, if something hadn't been broken so early. It wasn't just the question of my sister; it was vaster than that, it was the entire course of events, the wretchedness of the body and of desire, the decisions you make and on which you can't go back, the very meaning you choose to give this thing that's called, perhaps wrongly, your life."

The symbol of the twin—and, without giving too much away, it bears noting that there are many pairs of twins in the novel—seems to stand for the outrageous imperfection that drives Aue's transgression: the constant presence in the psyche of another, more perfect self one also knows is lost forever. All of Aue's regressive fantasies of reconciliation come to a head late in the novel

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in an extraordinary onanistic interlude—a sordid but unexpectedly spellbinding one—in which he indulges in his sister's empty house, as Soviet troops remorselessly close in. And yet, even in his orgy of self-involvement, Aue recognizes that he seeks not sexual ecstasy but metaphysical bliss. It is "these imaginings, these forever rehearsed obsessions, and *not the thing itself*," Aue says (emphasis added), "that are the frantic driving forces behind our thirst for life, for knowledge, for the agonizing struggle of self."

A rather obvious parallel is Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Much as for Gustav von Aschenbach, the symbolism of personal abasement and perhaps extinction through feminine transformation is central to the landscape of Aue's dreams, some of which—notably an epic reverie after he is shot in the head at Stalingrad—are enigmatic in the extreme. It is also as a kind of feminine self-loss that Aue understands what one might otherwise criticize as an utterly stereotypical link between his Nazism and his homosexuality. The comparison with *Death in Venice* extends to Littell's crystalline and resolutely unexperimental prose style: dreams and sexuality trigger thematic fireworks, but the rhetoric is almost always measured, and the syntax never breaks down.

About the dense intertwinement of classical and Modernist sources and themes in Aue's psyche, dissertations will no doubt follow. But what does windy speculation about the depths of the psyche reveal about Nazism, a collective and concrete historical phenomenon? After all, however one interprets Aue's memorable and obsessional character, what remains to be sorted out is whether his personal history explains the awful history of the era.

One hypothesis to reject right away is that Aue is a representative man in the period. Far from it: Aue is, as he puts it, "a somewhat complicated intellectual," excellent at his tasks but dependent on more bureaucratically adept colleagues like his best friend, Thomas, for know-how and on luck for advancement. Aue was trained as a lawyer by Reinhard Höhn and rubs shoulders with Werner Best and Otto Ohlendorf—all historical figures whom cognoscenti will recognize as the self-styled "theorists" of the coming Nazi new order—but he never quite represses his literary leanings. His favorite reading for a time is the pseudo-academic *Festschrift* that Best assembled in honor of Himmler's fortieth birthday (a book that very much existed). Later, Aue alternates his flight from Pomerania before the Red Army in the calamitous final months of the war with quiet moments curled up in the forest with Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*.

In all this, Aue is deeply unlike not just Hitler—Timothy Ryback's excellent *Hitler's Private Library* confirms on the evidence of his reading that the dictator was the worst sort of commonplace bore—but also the rank-and-file SS, whose goals were narrowly bureaucratic or self-serving, to say nothing of Nazis in general. Aue stands for little more than his own idiosyncrasy. "A member of the *Sicherheitsdienst* who quotes Tertullian instead of Rosenberg or Hans Frank is always a pleasure," is how one of his few admiring colleagues puts it, to which one might be tempted to append the wish that there had been more of them.

Claude Lanzmann griped about Littell's omitting the victim's perspective from his novel.

Among others, Lanzmann griped about Littell's decision to omit the victim's perspective by presenting the war entirely through Nazi eyes. In an interview with *Ha'aretz* (the novel has also been translated into Hebrew), Littell offered a striking response to this objection. The perpetrators, he said, "are the ones who are doing something and changing the reality. It's very easy to understand the victim: something terrible happens to him and he reacts accordingly. But in terms of trying to understand something, there is nothing to examine. The perpetrator is more complicated to understand, along with the apparatus that activates him. By means of the attempt to give a voice to the perpetrator, lessons can be learned that will affect the way we look at the world today." But on reflection, the defense is not persuasive—at least by itself. If Littell's argument is sound, then why didn't he write a different novel, one about a more ordinary Nazi? "Why couldn't an SS-Obersturmbannführer have an inner life, desires, passions, just like any other man?" Aue asks, fairly, at the start. He can, but some rationale for caring about that inner life has to be found once it is shown that Aue is so different from the usual case.

Contrary to most foreign critics (and perhaps Littell's self-defense), the novel's true premise is not that Aue is like other perpetrators. It is that he stands for Nazism as a whole. Indeed, at several critical points, Aue tries to link his family story with the larger saga of his nation. At his mother's house, just before he commits his crime, Aue reflects that he, like Germany, must act in evil ways to overcome the past, or try to do so. The novel may turn on this climactic passage, which asserts not that Aue is like any other Nazi but that he is like all of Germany writ small. "The collective problem of the Germans," he thinks, "was the same as my own; they too were struggling to extract themselves from a painful past, to wipe the slate clean so they'd be able to begin new things. That was how they arrived at the most radical solution of them all: murder, the painful horror of murder." Aue, like Germany, nurtures a mystified spirit of resentment with a long dark history behind it; in his personal war and alongside others in the SS, he acts to effect a glorious restoration and purge himself of resentment, and the result—in both cases—is a heinous crime. History, in Aue's eyes, made them do it.

Before going on his killing spree, Aue asks himself whether "this new fact, even less reparable than the ones before it, opened in turn onto new abysses?" But it is on the premise of a correlation between world history and an individualized psyche—not the disquieting question Aue poses in light of that connection—that the design of the novel wholly depends. Though its success so far has been nourished by high-profile scandal, *The Kindly Ones* is really a rather earnest attempt to offer a lesson about how the most profound causes of potential crime lurk in the breasts of all "human brothers" (as Aue calls his *hypocrites lecteurs* in the celebrated opening sentence of the novel). Its curious implication is that Aue killed out of universally shared impulses rather than because of the evil ideology of his place and time, which, indeed, his crime is supposed to explain by a kind of analogy. But if the correspondence between Germany and Aue is in any way faulty or contrived, Aue's memoir, and thus Littell's enterprise, risks splitting into unrelated halves. Its beguiling fictional sounding of the depths of individual perversity would not even skim the surface of the sea of murder into which the Nazis plunged the Jews, and the world. The personal is the political—yet if *The Kindly Ones* earns its praise, it is perhaps only for rediscovering the mystery of their connection. ■

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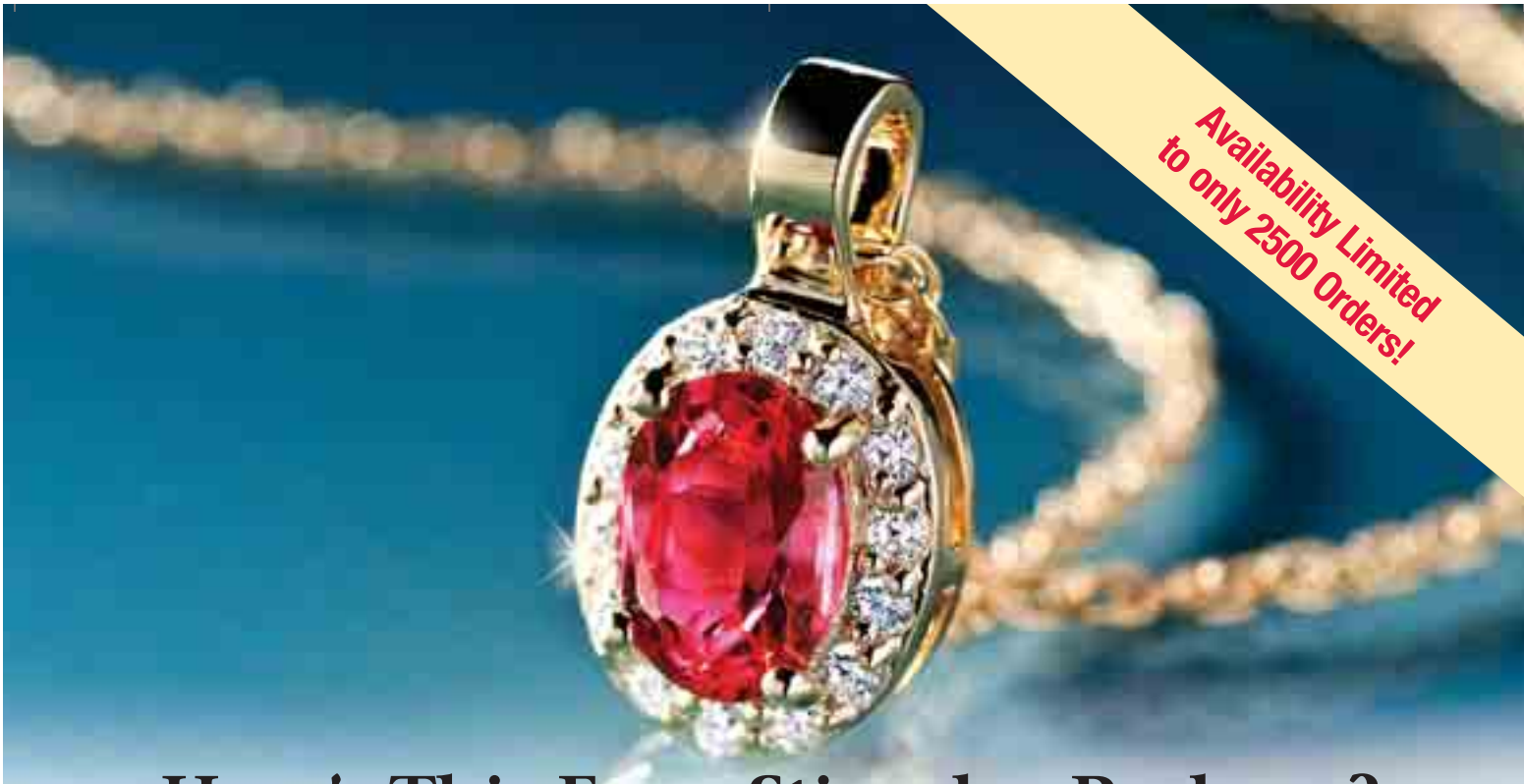

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Ceaselessly Opportuning

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

The Collected Poems of Barbara Guest
Edited by Hadley Haden Guest.
Wesleyan. 525 pp. $39.95.

Barbara Guest was one of the finest of that extraordinary cohort of American poets born in the 1920s, a generation various enough to include poets as dissimilar as Allen Ginsberg and James Merrill, Adrienne Rich and Robert Creeley, not to mention Guest's friends of the New York School, such as John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara. But the notion of a school does little to clarify the nature and significance of Guest's particular poetic achievement. Better just to say that Guest had a knack for catching sight of time in its act of escaping one's grasp. Time is the subject, for instance, of a long poem that has haunted me for nearly thirty years now, *The Türler Losses* (1979), a meditation on the compulsion to repeat the act of losing things, in this case a pair of fancy Swiss watches, Türlers, one of which, Guest writes, "loses time."

Perhaps the poem is a rejoinder to another great poem of the 1970s, Elizabeth Bishop's marmoreal "One Art," with its famous opening line, "The art of losing isn't hard to master"—an assertion that Bishop miraculously makes good on. Guest's repetitions and self-revisions are not tightly coiled into a villanelle as Bishop's are, however. For all the wisdom and poignancy of Bishop's poem, the reader cannot escape the disturbing sense that one is dealing with a sort of showpiece, not unlike a fine watch. Guest, by contrast, eschews the tactile compactness of "One Art," its reduction to a pith that can be held and turned over in the mind like a protective amulet; *The Türler Losses* is designed to keep slipping from your grasp as you read on. Digressive, at once restless and leisurely, its self-revisions appear gradually, almost indiscriminately, as "more and more memory begins to circumambulate" and Guest entertains a possibility that Bishop never would have, "a lessening perhaps of fastidiousness/the Timex phase." Guest does not propose to master time or loss. While instructing the reader or herself to "Look out for the watch/called 'Never Loses,'" she holds only to "the homespun/logic of our two-someness, a fabric time/will displace the threads, a shrivel here,/there a stain, the rotting commences like lanes/of traffic hurtling into air as the sun comes down."

Like time, Guest's poetry is elusive, moving from one thought or image to another almost before one has quite caught its drift, like the changing configurations of a kaleidoscope. No wonder her work has been slow to catch on. Yet Guest's readership has been growing, especially in the decade or so before her death in 2006. In 1994 she moved from New York City to Berkeley, California, in order to be closer to her daughter Hadley Haden Guest, who has now edited her *Collected Poems*; perhaps it took a certain distance from New York for Guest's work to be seen more clearly. But to a great extent the interest in Guest's work has grown thanks to a new generation of women avant-gardists who were drawn to her—for instance, those who publish in *How2*, the "gender specific magazine for experimental writing," where Guest's work was repeatedly featured from the journal's inception in 1999 through last year, when its most recent issue included a special feature on Guest, with four papers taken from a panel on her work at the Association of Writers and Writing Programs conference in Atlanta in 2007. Also, last year the summer issue of *Chicago Review* featured eleven essays on specific poems of Guest's, mostly by fellow poets, along with five uncollected poems and three short plays dating from the 1950s and '60s.

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Barbara Guest in 1999

Those five poems are not included in *The Collected Poems*, which, except for six final poems completed after the publication of the last book Guest saw to press, *The Red Gaze*, contains all the poetry that Guest collected in book form starting with her first full-length collection, *Poems: The Location of Things, Archaics, The Open Skies* (1962). This includes chapbooks, limited-edition collaborations with artists and even three poems from a 2003 collection of Guest's art writings. Poems that were published in journals but not collected by Guest are not here, nor are those (except for the five late ones I've mentioned) that remained in manuscript. All of which is to simply point out that this book is not a Complete but a Collected, in the narrowest sense. Not that I'm complaining. Guest's books and chapbooks were published by a wide range of presses, some in Canada and England; only her most assiduous admirers are likely to have them all. Yet they and others are likely to wonder what she was writing before *The Location of Things* was published in an edition of 300 copies. Guest was already 40. There must have been a lot of work leading up to that book. What was it like? And we know too that there was a never-published manuscript in the early 1960s, which was rejected for publication by Denise Levertov, then the poetry editor for Norton, on the grounds that it displayed "the typical chic flipness of the NY School"—some of the unpublished poems in the *Chicago Review* would have been part of that. One could have hoped for a selection of these early and little-known works to give a fuller picture of Guest's development.

Another of Levertov's complaints to Guest was that "often a poem of yours has seemed to me like an unrelated series of poem-seeds, none of them developed." It is an astute observation and one that Guest might not have repudiated, except of course for the tone of complaint with which it was lodged. In a lecture given in 1990 Guest appreciatively quoted the French Symbolist poet Jules Laforgue, who observed, "In the flashes of identity between subject and object lie the nature of genius. And any attempt to codify such flashes is but an academic pastime." What for Levertov were merely seeds are Laforgue's—and Guest's—"flashes,"

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just as Levertov's all-important "development" was for them mere "codification." This points to a fundamental difference between Levertov—three years younger but already a far more prominent figure in the poetry world—and Guest: the former was essentially a classicist in aesthetics; the latter, a pure romantic. The essence of romantic poetry, as Friedrich Schlegel asserted in 1798, was that "it should forever be becoming and never perfected."

Few modern poets exemplify such forever-becoming more vividly than Guest. It was Charles Olson who in 1950 theorized a poetry in which "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION." But it is Guest more than anyone, not excluding Olson, who found a way to practice it (and certainly without the need to shout it in capital letters). But allowing the link in these chains of perception to remain tacit, as Guest often does, can make her poems seem ungraspable, mere will-o'-the-wisps, at least until the reader gets the knack of following along with the requisite free-floating attentiveness. All the more so because, for Guest (as was the case for Bishop too), a perception is not necessarily a token of bedrock certainty or truth. Guest's was a more dialectical mind than that, and for her, the particulars of perception were always wrapped up in uncertainty and tentativeness and the occasion for questions rather than credences—as one discovers immediately in her first book in the poem "The Location of Things":

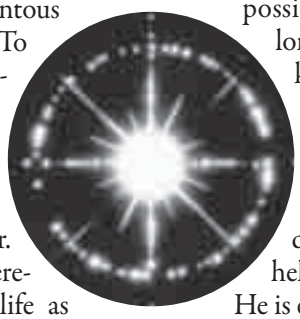
> Why from this window am I
> watching leaves?
> Why do halls and steps seem
> narrower?
> Why at this desk am I listening for
> the sound of the fall
> of color, the pitch of the wooden
> floor
> and feet going faster?
> Am I to understand change, whether
> remarkable
> or hidden, am I to find a lake under
> the table
> or a mountain beside my chair
> and will I know the minute water
> produces lilies
> or a family of mountaineers scales
> the peak?

Guest's "poetic mobility," as this passage shows, is inseparable from her sense of having ripened "under the shadow of Surreal-

—The Moment Has Come—

Eventually, men* will realize that they are travelling together on a journey of Self-discovery, one which will bring them in time to the feet of the Most Holy.

The essence of this journey of discovery is that it is self-enacted and willed, and at the same time is shared by all members, known and unknown, of the human family. True it is that all men are brothers, sons of the One Father, each engaged, consciously or otherwise, in this momentous adventure we call life. To many today, unfortunately, this adventure is a painful and degrading experience; to millions, it is unjust and barren, the sooner over the better.



Small wonder is it, therefore, that so many see life as drudgery and grind, their child-engendered dreams of achievement and happiness but distant memories.

Men are born to create and grow in Self-awareness, and need the environment in which that becomes possible. The terrible disease of commercialization has robbed countless millions of their birthright and, as its insidious growth encroaches on all aspects of men's lives, its tentacles of disaster squeeze every generous and human feeling from their hearts. Humanity is in thrall to commercialization and in peril of its soul.

Reverse

What can men do to reverse this process of disaster? Already, the current economic and financial chaos, symptoms of the destructive forces of commercialization, are showing men that they can no longer allow this monster to rule their lives; that they must take stock and assess anew their priorities for a more just and healthy economic structure which will the better serve their needs.

There are, of course, many, relatively untouched by the current crisis, who see this time as a 'downturn' and look forward in full confidence to the inevitable 'upturn', when we can carry on as before. This is no longer possible; the blind can no longer lead the blind. They know not of Maitreya.

Moment

Maitreya has chosen this moment to fulfill his promise to enter the domain of men and to help them on their journey. He is emerging now; his herald, the star-sign of his emergence, is seen worldwide by many and is the signal of his appearance, openly, before men. Using the television resources of today, he will engage on a series of interviews starting in America and including Japan and many other countries.

As an ordinary man, undeclared as Maitreya, he will speak for all those who have no voice, no spokesman. He will call on men to share the goods of the Earth and to embrace each other as the brothers and sisters they are. He will show that if we would have peace there is only one way to achieve it: that is by the realization of justice throughout the world, and that justice can only be achieved through sharing. We await the response of all men and women of goodwill in this, our world.

This article, published in *Share International* magazine, was written by a Master of Wisdom. The Masters, headed by Maitreya, the World Teacher, are highly advanced teachers and advisors of humanity who are planning to work openly in the world very soon.

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*men is a general term meaning humankind

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ism," as she noted in a lecture she gave in 1986. These lines are pervaded by something like the Surrealists' sense of the marvelous—that lake under the table—yet there is something vaguely unsettling about them. They speak less about the freedom of the mind to conjure a reality in its own image than about the probability that reality will overflow the definitions that the mind might try to impose upon it. And they are as self-mocking as they are rhapsodic. The poet appears strictly agnostic about whether the overturning of perspective whereby a mountain and a chair are placed on the same level is sublime or ridiculous.

In Guest's early poetry, however, she's still often enough trying to impose a design on reality. Style interposes itself. In common with the poetry of Ashbery's first book, *Some Trees*, and with some of O'Hara's early work, there is often a sense of artifice verging on artiness in *The Location of Things* that would later disappear; Levertov's phrase "chic flipness" doesn't quite hit the mark, but one sees what she was getting at. And then there's the problem of syntax—which must always tend to codify (to go back to Laforgue's terminology) those "flashes of identity between subject and object" that embody heightened attention. In the stanza I've quoted, the flashes come a bit more slowly and heavily than they should. The architecture of the sentence becomes a drag on the kinetics of the line. In the next poem in the collection, "Piazzas," something different happens. Here are its first three stanzas:

> In the golden air, the risky
> autumn,
> leaves on the piazza, shadows by the
> door
> on your chair the red berry
> after the dragonfly summer
>
> we walk this mirroring air our feet
> chill
> and silver and golden a portrait
> by Pinturicchio we permanently
> taste the dark
> grapes and the seed pearls glisten
>
> as the flight of those fresh brown
> birds
> an instant of vision that the coupling
> mind
> and heart see in their youth
> with thin wings attacking a real
> substance
> as Pinturicchio fixed his air.

Here, syntax and line interact much differently from the opening of "The Location of Things." Syntax is stretched nearly, but not quite, to the breaking point. Language rushes forward ahead of itself—not gushing but fleet. The first stanza is structured by an understated parallelism, the fact that each line (and the second line twice) is constructed around a prepositional phrase. Only then, once this cloud of vectors and relations has been established, do subjects and actions appear: "we walk" and "our feet chill." When the sixth line opens with "and" we anticipate that a third subject/verb pairing will follow—and "silver," being a noun as well as an adjective, does not immediately disabuse us of the expectation, but then "and golden" gives the line (and therefore the stanza) an energetic twist: it forces a parallelism between two verb constructions and a noun phrase ("we walk," "our feet chill," "a portrait by Pinturicchio"). One could easily rearrange lines 6–8, adding just one more little preposition to form a conventionally reasonable sentence or clause that would function as an expanded parallelism with the two constructions that make up line 5—"and in a silver and golden portrait by Pinturicchio we permanently taste the dark grapes and the seed pearls glisten"—but how much would be lost thereby: the energy of movement that constructs "an instant of vision" out of many such instants. And notice what Guest gains by playing this coiled syntax off against her line breaks: telling enjambments like "taste the dark/grapes" and "coupling mind/and heart"—reminding us that when mind and heart are joined, they join dissimilar things in poetic vision.

Synthesized with the self-questioning perceptiveness of "The Location of Things," the self-revising syntax of "Piazzas" would set the course of Guest's subsequent development. And it's not only syntax that she treats as plastic; words themselves can be molded and re-formed. "*A poem stretches when Pressure on a word causes the poem to stretch*," Guest once wrote. One finds coinages like "opportuning," "diehardness," "noblessly" and "manufacturess"—all from the 1973 collection *Moscow Mansions*, in which the poem "Passage," dedicated to the saxophonist John Coltrane, seems to offer a rationale for her treatments of language as material comparable to a musician's use of sounds or a painter's of color:

> Words
> after all
> are syllables *just*
> and you put them
> in their place
> notes
> sounds
> a painter using his stroke
> so the spot
> where the article
> an umbrella
> a knife
> we could find
> in its most intricate
> hiding
> slashed as it was with color
> called "being"
> or even "it"

From the mid-1970s on, Guest deployed her linguistic freedom with ever increasing elasticity, "opportuning" ceaselessly, so that nearly every book would have a distinctive character: the campy, quasi-narrative prose poetry of *The Countess From Minneapolis* (1976); the ruminative "circumambulation" of *The Türler Losses*, always turning back on itself to find itself missing like our experience of time; the rarefaction of *Defensive Rapture* (1993), which is taken to an even greater extreme in the Mallarmé-esque *Quill, Solitary APPARITION* (1996) but is not the same as the abrupt condensations of *Miniatures and Other Poems* (2002), which take on a more vatic, at times almost archaic, tone in *The Red Gaze*. My favorite among Guest's books, at least this week, might be *Rocks on a Platter: Notes on Literature* (1999), which, though it begins and ends with quotations from Hölderlin and incorporates passages from Hegel, Adorno and Dr. Johnson, is far from the work of critical exegesis its subtitle implies, though it is always explicating itself and then transforming through that explication. Each line, as Brenda Hillman says in a sensitive discussion of the book in *Chicago Review*, seems "to present a new beginning": "Shattered rocks//hid in the rock?/Deft, vehement. Amulet cast from the pocket.// And wind over red-tiled roof and we grow closer//to the moss of subjectivity guarding an iron basin//limed, old stars."

Having learned from "Piazzas" to pay attention to prepositions, we should pay attention to the parallelism between title and subtitle: as much as about rocks or literature, though both are mentioned, the poem is about the relationship, as much tactile as semantic, conveyed by "on." And the "notes," for that matter, are musical tones as much as remarks:

> *And the words linger, deciding which*
> *direction to take.*
>
> *Will they remain with the middle*
> *chord. The atonal section is*

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fearful, running along beside the pale
brook, clouding and unclouding.

If the title, "Rocks on a Platter," is taken as another way of saying "words on a page," as I think it can be, then the upshot is that language can be experienced as if it were an assemblage of solid objects, tangible stuff with weight and volume and a capacity to make noise as words clatter against each other. But for Guest, this moment in which language appears in its concreteness, desirable as it may be, is not yet the great desideratum of poetry. "Eventually as the poem progresses," Guest once explained, "the poem will find words are lifted from its page…and the poem will be known as 'winged.'" That words can be like notes, like strokes of paint, means that they are comparable to things of more evident material substance or sensual impact; yet at the same time it is to see them in abstraction from their own specific material substrate. There is also a dematerialization of the word—"not the thing, but its effect," in the words of Mallarmé that Guest quotes in a 1986 essay. For her, this is experienced as a sort of trembling, a vibration whereby language becomes unstable, and "this trembling is a good idea, because it means you are not exactly in charge." "A poem should tremble a little," she repeated sixteen years later; it should contain a "mysterious element of change, as when the poem lies quivering on its page."

This trembling or quivering is something that occurred in Guest's writing with greater and greater frequency as she grew older. Here is "Freed Color," from her last book, *The Red Gaze*:

The branches are placed in a wet
cloth,
clover reaches out.

They cannot locate a blue vine.
Purple fills the agenda. Red is on the
plant,
the setting of a hibiscus tree.
They are warned not to linger in the
purple shade.

Are these bitter colors? Are they
accompanied
by rhyme to cheer them when they
cross
into that land where color is rare?

They hasten to make use of freed
color
who bends to no one,
who dwells in a tent like rhythm
continuously rolled.

To stop the riot of color, to hasten
the quiet paucity of rhythm,
to sleep when it is time.

And doors open into narrow
surprise.
The jingle of crystal follows you
everywhere,
even into the whistling corridor.

Nothing flip or chic there, but true enough, "Freed Color" is what Levertov had long ago accused Guest's poems of being, a sequence of poem-seeds—not unrelated but with a tacit relation, "like rhythm/continuously rolled." Like much of *The Red Gaze*, this poem derives from memories of Hans Hofmann's famous painting class in Provincetown, where so many of the Abstract Expressionist painters Guest had admired had learned so much—memories that must go back half a century, since Hofmann closed his school in 1958. These memories, poignantly concrete and sensuous, register with magnificent serenity. Though "doors open into narrow surprise," one is not surprised. Behind the poem lurks a mysterious drama, but it is one that has already been performed. "The structure of the poem should create an embrasure," Guest once wrote, "inside of which language is seated in watchful docility." In poems such as this, language watches coolly but with thoughtful alertness, ready for the losses it must inevitably register. ■

The Eye That Collects

by J. GABRIEL BOYLAN

For nearly sixty years of his life, Walker Evans collected picture postcards. An exhibit of that collection, which by the time of Evans's death in 1975 totaled some 9,000 items, is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City through May 25. In a telling gesture, a vitrine near the exhibit's entrance houses objects from Evans's other collections—bottle caps, beer tabs, driftwood, road signs—as well as postcard storage boxes and dividers with labels like "Street Scenes," "Summer Hotels," "Fancy Architecture," "Railroad Stations," "Monuments," "Bridges" and "Curiosities." Such categories could well classify Evans's own photographs, from the stark, magisterial black-and-white pictures he took while working with the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression to the haunting color images that he made with a Polaroid SX-70 Land Camera in the last years of his life. Evans is widely touted as having fully refined the documentary style of photography, a "styleless" or "artless" style that married simplicity of composition, devotion to the life of the vernacular and social awareness.

While the postcards clearly resonate with Evans's photography, it's worth asking whether the collection should be understood not as an archive of source texts but as an artistic project in its own right. After all, Evans's first contact with the Museum of Modern Art, the institution that would vault him to wide esteem in the art world, was a project undertaken in 1936 featuring photographic images printed by Evans in the dimensions of postcards. (Examples of these small prints are on view at the Met; the project was abandoned in 1938.) A decade on, newly installed at *Fortune* as "special photographic editor," Evans turned his first picture story into a portfolio of postcards from his collection. An unsigned response to the piece noted, "His selections are manifestly

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Future New York, "The City of Skyscrapers," a postcard from the Walker Evans Archive

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neither a gag nor a fad nor an amusing hobby; they perform exactly the same function as his photographs."

Evans's devotion to, and obsession with, indigenous forms, and his developing taste for vernacular objects worth collecting, were points of fierce pride. Friends and acquaintances sent Evans postcards in hopes theirs might be inducted into the rarefied lot of his collection, while his counterparts in the art and publishing world humored his interests, publishing several postcard-based photo essays and inviting him to lecture on the subject. To all suitors and facilitators Evans tended to play the part of the evangelist, arguing that the postcards were more than ephemera of an age gone by. Their very ordinariness was, to him, critical to their significance in telling the story of the United States. He was always at pains to prove that his interest in these documents wasn't comedic or, worse, ironic. People did indeed appreciate the postcards, mostly because of the aura of the collector. This was a disappointment. Evans intended his collection to be more than an interesting tidbit; to him, it was an object lesson. The postcards exhibited a profound vision of American life, one he perhaps thought even superior to his own.

Who collects, and why? Along with the completists are those collectors just as happy to hunt and gather on the margins of a genre. There are collectors obsessed with calculating the value of an object according to an economics of scarcity and those obsessed only with the value they ascribe to their objects. There are collectors whose aim is the preservation of history for posterity, and those whose aim is purely autobiographical. Few collectors simply accumulate. Always there is an underlying principle, be it obsessive, altruistic or economic. This determines which genre of vinyl records, what vintage of comic book, which brand of electric guitar, what era of books and which sort of postcards are sought and treasured the most.

Born in 1903, Evans came of age as a boom in American travel coincided with an explosion in the picture postcard business. Away from home, Americans kept in touch with loved ones and recorded their unprecedented journeys to distant towns and cities. In 1903 the US Postal Service processed 700 million postcards. They cost only a penny to mail, and following a change in the postal code in 1907, half of a postcard's blank side was for correspondence and the other half for the address. (Taken by amateurs, the postcards were printed and hand-colored, mostly in Germany.) Some older cards have even briefer messages scrawled right on the pictures. Evans loved such anomalies: one card on display at the Met reads, "Drug store where I am now working," with an arrow pointing to the shop.

Evans began collecting during his teens, purchasing cards as mementos of family trips. He bought new cards at Kresge's and Woolworths but also looked for older examples, raiding the cards kept by family and friends. While the size of Evans's collection is impressive for a lifetime, it is hardly astronomical, and if you consider that 9,000 cards amount to an average of 150 per year, or just three per week, it seems modest indeed. Evans could have amassed ten times as many cards, but he treated his collection as something more than an agglomeration. Evans was a connoisseur, not just of the various types of cards, or of cards from selected decades, but of a card's composition, color and mood. Evans didn't desire just any postcard—because just any postcard wouldn't express the variety of elements he wanted his collection to breathe. His was a curated selection of objects, one with intention, personality and purpose.

The Met exhibit, which features around 750 cards, encompasses just a few rooms, yet it feels quite expansive. Upon entering, one sees a giant grid of more than 200 "street scene" postcards. Nearby is a vitrine with Evans's other collections and a spinner-rack display of beach scenes. Deeper in, smaller but still dauntingly jampacked grids of cards featuring factories, disasters and more present themselves along the walls. Interspersed are cases containing Evans's magazine articles about postcards and the actual cards reproduced therein. Finally, there are several examples of Evans's own images in postcard size, which illustrate strongly his debt to the aesthetics of his collecting, and his glee in matching the "styleless" style of the postcards with his camera eye.

The beach scenes in the first room have few crashing waves and dramatic sunsets; mainly there are throngs of well-covered beachgoers and a lot of municipal buildings. One is simply a woman cowering beneath an umbrella. Her face cannot be made out.

The street scenes are mostly Mains and Fronts, alphabetical by state. They are uniformly mundane views, often poorly composed. The photographers ended up chopping off a steeple here, half a family there. On many, the image is almost entirely composed of the road itself, paved or unpaved. Buildings and cars peek in, often from behind trees, but

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the prime visual real estate is the street.

Factories belching smoke. Hideous resort hotels. Strangely shaped lighthouses. An image of the Holland Tunnel with oddly static-looking cars, plastic-looking drivers and passengers. An image of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel with no cars at all; it's just the inside of a tunnel.

The most common phrases on the cards are "a glimpse of…," "birds eye view of…" or "looking from…." Then the cards have quick notes telling which room the sender occupies in the pictured resort, lamenting the inability of the recipient to come join the vacationer, or making jokes. In the Met gallery, one-liners drifted over the hum and buzz of the crowd, much like the brief messages scrawled across some of the images.

"That's near Chicago."

"Someone gave me a bunch like this."

"What a bizarre scene."

"That building is still there."

"God in heaven, that's what it looked like."

I got pretty excited when I found a few postcards showing my hometown too.

In his introduction to the exhibition catalog, curator Jeff Rosenheim writes, "A surprising number of highly accomplished writers, picture makers, and performers are obsessive collectors." He then speaks of Nabokov, Degas, Warhol and others. Of more recent collector-artists, Martin Parr and Richard Prince have received perhaps as much esteem for their canny collections of postcards (Parr) and trashy dime-store novels and Beat ephemera (Prince) as for their fine-art production, a development that would have thrilled Evans. Rosenheim denotes the reasons behind such collections: "pleasure and instruction, to recover their lost youth, to build archives of material upon which to construct their own personas…source material for their art…a distraction from the burden of creation." The notion of the artist as collector, and of the collection as artwork, has matured significantly since Evans's time.

Yet in his time it was a rather marginal idea that a collection, especially of something as banal as picture postcards, could relay any deep meaning or significance. "I think artists are collectors figuratively," Evans once said. "I've noticed that my eye collects." His work conveyed a reverence for anonymity and mass production, yet the anonymous, mass-produced items he so cherished as indigenous expressions of American life were seen as mere curios of a bygone age. He frequently extolled such average stuff as office furniture and common hand tools

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in his columns for *Fortune* and *Architectural Forum*. He kept lists of hoped-for concepts for pieces that never made it into the magazines but are telling nonetheless: "Ocean liners to be scrapped," "Roadside Motels," "Post Offices," "Freight Car Signs," "Jail."

In a 1964 lecture at Yale University, a transcript of which is included in the exhibition catalog, Evans laid out his most compelling argument for the postcard collection as art. He referred to his own photographic style as the "lyric documentary" and compared it to the works of Henry James, Eugene Atget and to the postcards. This style was contrasted with the "decadent lyric," the rather more artificial, aesthetically overwrought style of his photographic forebear, Alfred Stieglitz. He told his audience at Yale: "The real thing I'm talking about has purity and a certain severity, rigor, simplicity, directness, clarity, and it is without artistic pretension in a self-conscious sense of the word. That's the base of it: they're hard and firm." Elsewhere he warned against thoughts of straight nostalgia ("'Good old times' is a cliché of the doddering mind"), while lamenting the modern postcard, which he had called the "quintessence of gimcrack…gaudy boasts that such and such a person visited such and such a place, and for some reason had a fine time." "Gone is all feeling for the actual appearance of street," he insisted, "of lived architecture, or of human mien."

Yet while narrating a slide show that concluded the lecture, Evans lost the ability to convey his angle: "I haven't got much to say about that except you just probably feel as I do…" and "That's a document, and of course it's gained a great deal in time." It is the push and pull of the public and private at work. Reading these rhapsodic lines and seeing the cards—street scenes, men gambling, rail yards—one senses his difficulty putting forth to an audience of strangers what had taken him a lifetime to hone. At one point he admitted, "You have to spend much too much time going through *junk* to pick out ones that appeal to you that have this style that I care about." To Evans the import of the images, the brilliance of composition and the wonder of their dull beauty is self-evident and moreover deeply personal, perhaps beyond telling, yet the urge to share drives the whole enterprise. Taking in these images at the Met is something like looking into the artist's eye, the eye that collects, and gaining a profound comprehension of what that eye was always seeking. ■

The Mutual Human Concern

by STUART KLAWANS

Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Tokyo Sonata* lurches from one scene to the next with the gait of Frankenstein's monster—a style of locomotion that is not unexpected, considering that the writer-director made his name with horror films. To date, he has filled the screen with cybernetic zombies, rampaging jellyfish, amnesiac murderers under hypnotic control; and the off-balance rhythm in which he has told their stories has carried into this new film, even though it's a comedy of desperation about a family of near-perfect middle-class drabness.

The paterfamilias (Teruyuki Kagawa) is a short, thick-chested salaryman with bulging eyes and a wide, glum mouth—a frog, you'd think, waddling about in a business suit—who loses his job in the film's first scene. The wife and mother (Kyoko Koizumi) is a slender, pretty flower, stuck in a pot and left to wilt in a sunless house. The college-age son (Yu Koyanagi) wears his hair samurai-style and makes a point of returning home only when it suits him—affectations that can't disguise his status as a day laborer who hands out leaflets on street corners. This leaves the younger son (Kai Inowaki) to be the rule-breaker in the family. A gawky grade-schooler, he rebels by taking piano lessons on the sly.

REGENT RELEASING

Kyoko Koizumi as Megumi Sasaki in *Tokyo Sonata*

This isn't the stuff of nightmares; but Kurosawa makes the scenes stagger even so, with edits that can go from a soft, shadowed, lingering close-up of the wife's dreamy face to a garishly lit tracking shot of the husband crashing into a pile of garbage, and another, and another. "It lives!" Kurosawa might cry, looking upon the monster he's galvanized: this unhappy but orderly family, which gradually becomes chaotic and even more unhappy.

Then, against all odds, the film concludes with three minutes of spun moonlight.

Smooth and fanciful, a little bit melancholy but a lot more hopeful, the surprise ending of *Tokyo Sonata* might come across as unbelievable if it weren't for the utter plausibility of the preceding two hours of shocks and bumps, which don't rely on the metaphors that are the stock in trade of horror movies but instead arouse disquiet (and mirth) from a recognizable here and now. The timely setting is a Japan in the grip of recession, where salarymen whose jobs have been outsourced wait silently in the stairwells of employment bureaus, only to be told, "It's 100 percent impossible you'll match your previous job." All Kurosawa needs to punch up this situation is a touch of exaggeration: a doubling and tripling of the figure of the main salaryman (who keeps meeting other versions of himself) and an intensification of his sense of shame, to the point that he lies to his family. Rather than lose his domestic authority—the only kind he's got left—he puts on a suit every day and tells them he's going to work.

In his dumb, stolid way, he's trying to maintain an outmoded way of life, which Kurosawa sums up, and perhaps sends up, in a "typically Japanese" conceit reminiscent of an Ozu film: a railway runs close by the family's house. But it's too late now for Ozu's subtlety and discretion; Kurosawa's trains rattle right past the window and light up the interior like a strobe. No wonder the rest of the family wants to break out of the traditional arrangement: the younger son by taking his covert piano lessons, the older son by enlisting in the US Army (another little exaggeration) and the wife by getting a driver's license she knows she might never use. Her big secret is that she sneaks out to visit auto showrooms; her dream is a new convertible. Then calamity strikes, she finds herself behind the wheel, and the many roads that have been running through the film's background suddenly come front and center.

Perhaps the happiest surprise in *Tokyo Sonata* is the way the film shifts at this point (with a grinding of gears) from being his story to being hers. The wife's longing has been visible from the first lovely shot in the film, which finds her framed in the open doorway of her house, letting fresh air blow in along with a driving rain. She can't yet cross that messy sill, or speak of wanting to

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do so. But she helps put her sons onto routes away from the house; and when her own opportunity to leave is finally forced upon her, she does not push it away, even though the man who brings it is insane. Her choice at this point is something else that seems strangely plausible, an effect that might be credited not just to Kurosawa but to a team that included a trio of women: screenwriter Sachiko Tanaka (working with Kurosawa and Max Mannix), cinematographer Akiko Ashizawa and producer Yukie Kito.

I feel as if they all contributed something of themselves to the shining moment late in the film when the wife wanders along a beach, alone, after her family has been blown apart. As the camera backs away, she slowly advances, a dark figure with an irregular gait. Her expression is at once blank and overcharged with emotion, as if she had witnessed horrors. Then, out of nowhere, light begins to wash over her, growing more and more bright until she bursts into a blaze of color.

Nothing supernatural has occurred; it's just that dawn has broken. But for these few seconds, as *Tokyo Sonata* starts toward its happy ending, you get the uncanny feeling that the sun has risen inside her.

With the possible exception of Margaret Thatcher, who is present only as a voice on the soundtrack, no one is dehumanized in Steve McQueen's *Hunger*. People are stripped naked, smeared with filth, cut, punched, kicked, bludgeoned, shot through the brain and, for the finale, reduced by starvation to little more than a membrane—and yet, astonishingly, the last ounce of dignity is never squeezed out of anyone.

To the degree that you focus on the film's contextual information, such as its excerpts from Thatcher's speeches, the meaning of these events will seem political. That's because *Hunger* is about Northern Ireland's Maze prison in 1981 and the men of the Provisional IRA who were held in it: their demands, their protests, their strategies. But to the degree that you focus on the film as a sensory re-creation—"re-enactment" is too weak a word for *Hunger*—it will seem like an experiment in extremity. McQueen grinds existence down to its minimum, the better to assay the human essence that remains.

Even the jailers have their emotions. Although *Hunger* eventually settles its attention on Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender), the republican prisoner who led the 1981 hunger strike in the Maze and died of it, the film devotes its opening to the sufferings of a guard. At first you see only his hands, swol-

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len and scraped, as he soaks them in a bathroom sink. By the time the man, Raymond Lohan (Stuart Graham), comes into full view at the breakfast table, you see that he's exhausted at the start of the day. Even when Lohan gets to his place of business and dons a uniform with the rest of his shift, McQueen's images emphasize the weight of isolation that hangs on this man like his bruised fists. A long shot, patiently held, reveals him standing in his shirt sleeves against a courtyard wall, all by himself, as he takes a cigarette break amid a snow flurry.

Lohan is alone, but he's not singular. You can later see his weariness in another guard, who laboriously makes his way down a cellblock corridor, cleaning up the piss that prisoners have poured onto the floor. Later still, in the most brutal scene, you see something like Lohan's suppressed turmoil surface in the face of a riot cop, who stands apart from the rest of his mayhem-dealing squad and weeps.

Whether any riot cop has behaved this way, I don't know. But I'm sure that when McQueen imagined this moment, he was after something more vital than all-purpose pity, and more honest than a sentimental evenhandedness toward captors and captives. He was showing, in one terrible image, how will and purpose can struggle against constraint in a man who's relatively free. For most of the film, in many terrible images, McQueen shows that same struggle in men who have only the freedom to refuse.

They can huddle naked under blankets rather than wear prison uniforms, and paint the walls of their cells with shit rather than accept baths. These are the limited options that McQueen introduces through the eyes of Davey Gillen (Brian Milligan), a defiant but clearly terrified young republican, who steps into his first cell in the Maze and discovers a kind of fecal Lascaux cave, where a forked creature with matted hair and beard crouches in the corner. This turns out to be Gerry Campbell (Liam McMahon), a more experienced republican; and you get to spend some time with him, as you did with the guard, before McQueen at last drags Bobby Sands into the picture, to have his compulsory bath and a collision with Lohan's aching fists.

Once Sands is present, as embodied in a terrifyingly committed and physically dangerous performance by Fassbender, McQueen can lead *Hunger* to its emotional and intellectual core: a debate between Sands and a visiting republican priest (Liam Cunningham) about the plan to make the ultimate refusal, of food and life. Of course it's a political matter; the sharp-witted, contentious dialogue (written by Enda Walsh) leaves no doubt of that. But the way that McQueen suddenly pares down his image-making, to allow you to concentrate on the words, also intensifies that other element of *Hunger*, its insistence that mutual human concern is irreducible. The gut-wrenching tracking shots stop. So does the previous succession of mostly wordless, meticulously framed close-ups and wide-angle views, with their vortex-like rhythm. All you see, for something like twenty minutes, is a single, steady shot of two men sitting opposite each other at a table, their figures in shadow but the contour lines of their bodies traced by sunlight filtering in from behind. They cannot agree, but for the longest time they do not separate.

You may wonder why you should give your time to the obsessively painful experience of *Hunger*, which in many ways, as an art project, resembles the wall paintings in the Maze. The answer, I think, comes in the final section of the film, after Sands has entered the hunger strike. He no longer has anything to do but wait, and McQueen no longer has any violence to spring on you. The ordeal has paradoxically become placid and antiseptic; the very worst of the keepers behaves gently. Sands now has something outward to lose—but, as you see, he chooses to keep what's inside.

Theater schedules, like magazine deadlines, can be unforgiving. Before I had a chance to publish anything about Andrzej Wajda's *Katyn*, it had already concluded its premiere run at New York's Film Forum. But other engagements may follow around the country, and even a late, brief notice of a Wajda film matters more than a timely one about almost anyone else's movie. So, with your indulgence:

For much of its length, *Katyn* is not so much concerned with a historic massacre—the murder of thousands of Polish officers by the Red Army in 1940—as it is with the uses to which this slaughter was put. First came the creation of a propaganda film by the Nazis, to show the barbarism of their enemy; and then a very similar film by the victorious Soviets, to demonstrate fascist barbarity and cover up their crime. As Wajda dramatizes this change, the epic sweep of his wartime scenes gives way to a series of more intimate postwar episodes, in which various survivors try to tell the truth and are destroyed for it.

Throughout most of his long life, Wajda himself was unable to speak this truth in public. It's broken free of him now, in a film that's grand, sorrowful, masterful, moving and (in the end) resolute about bringing reality close to the touch. ■

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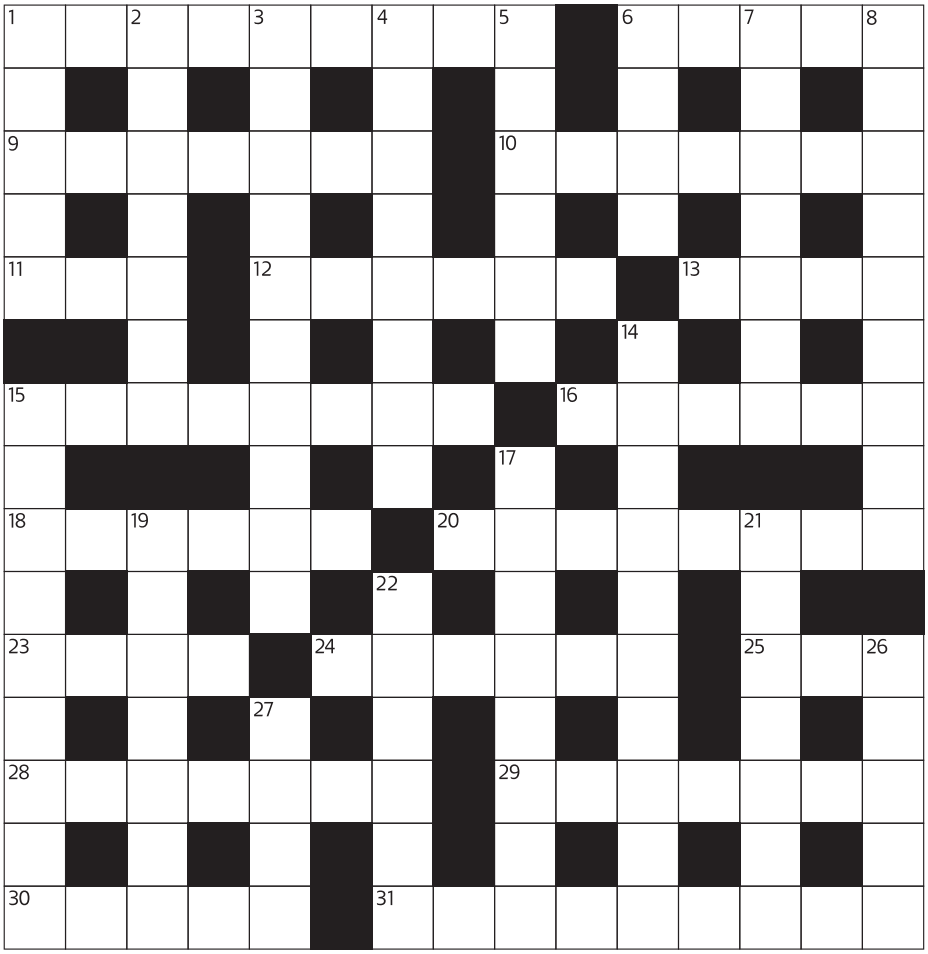

ACROSS

1 An official has to stand behind it! Run across it and it goes up on the board. (4,5)

6 Cause a couple of hands to get together, and go up and down. (5)

9 One doesn't like to run it when sailing. (7)

10 Made reference to the fact that everything gets sort of due, with a barely passing grade. (7)

11, **12** and **13** 6 across could get 30, to a point, and earn this title. (3,4,2,4)

15 One of these digs in the sand and lies in wait for the worker going to Long Island briefly, meeting a disturbed offspring. (3,5)

16 In public, ours expect to show where drivers start out at least nine times—and swear about nothing at all! (6)

18 and **26** down Where they feel low-down, even at home? Remainder the lady's property! (11)

20 They're hailed more often than Caesar was! (8)

23 See 6 down

24 Also dragged around inside in Spain? (6)

25 Possibly low flying at night, traditionally. (3)

28 One who doesn't play fair makes a bad teacher. (7)

29 I exist in a rainstorm finally, like the Spanish or Portuguese. (7)

30 Perhaps stick with a fork in reaching for the asparagus, in part—or possibly pears, too! (5)

31 Swingers of a sort make them at times. (They reputedly work only in the sunshine!) (9)

DOWN

1 Earth-shaking type of courage! (5)

2 Melodic embellishment in your private nook, when little Mortimer is around. (7)

3 Bob is at one end of such, used if you like things straight up and down. (5,5)

4 A golf club, when in the sand, possibly. (Fire back on them!) (8)

5 The wrong name otherwise—a charming one might do it. (6)

6, **17** and **23** across To which carts were pulled by hand, and someone finally said, "This is the place!" (4,4,4,4)

7 A place in Massachusetts also finished here. (7)

8 Stop those feelings of rage! Such causes possible harm! (9)

14 *The Mikado*, for example. (5,5)

15 Tells everyone that the young lady has put on a little weight! (9)

17 See 6

19 A flying one might be associated with the air. (7)

21 A plant of the buttercup family, done to a nice turn. (7)

22 A glorious day to many—and part of our thoughts show it! (6)

26 See 18 across

27 The main part comes up with deserters from the ship. (4)

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